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The Spotter-Detective; OR, THE GIRLS OF NEW YORK.

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"OVERLAND KIT," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE ESCAPE FROM SING SING.

THE close of a cold January afternoon; the sun sinking slowly behind the far-off hills, and its last golden beams falling full upon the cold stone-walls of Sing-Sing prison—the cruel barriers which held within their folds the doomed ones upon whom the law's iron hand had fallen with relentless force.

It was a Sunday afternoon, a day of rest even in Sing-Sing jail.

In the main hall three keepers were lounging, together with one of the convicts, who acted as water-carrier, and so was allowed the freedom of the corridor.

It being Sunday, the prisoners—with the exception of the water-carrier—were all securely locked in their respective cells.

The keepers were idly pacing up and down, conversing together, while the convict, at the end of the corridor, looking out of what was termed the "north window," was gazing wishfully upon the distant hills—now whitened over by winter's icy hand—and thinking of the freedom which lay beyond the iron bars.

The cell nearest to the end of the corridor on the right was numbered "40." And in that cell, seated upon a low stool, with hands, knees and face pressed closely against the grating of the door, was a convict, who, with a beating heart, was eagerly watching for the light of day to grow dim and the shades of night to come.

The face that was pressed against the bars was no common one; it would have called for remark even in a crowd. Not a handsome face in repose—and yet—strange contradiction—when lighted up by a smile, it possessed a wondrous beauty.

The convict was a man who had seen some thirty years apparently; yet his dark-brown hair, almost black, was thickly tinged with gray, and there were hard, cruel lines about the eyes and mouth, which told of care and strife. But the complexion of the man was as fair and rosy as that of a child, and the quick, never quiet, gray-blue eyes, now stern and cold in nervous anxiety, could flash and shimmer with a joyous light, like unto the sunbeams playing in countless ripples upon the dark-blue surface of the rolling ocean wave.

The large gray-blue eyes and the bright, joyous smile were the glories of the face, and when they joined their powers, the marks of age, of strife and care, disappeared, and the man's face was young again.

Search the prison register!
"No. 40. John Blaine. Assault, with intent to kill; sentenced for five years; 1870."

And on that Sunday afternoon, in the month of January, 1873, the convict, who sat by the door of his prison-cell with his knees drawn up to his chin, had three more years to serve.

Three more years of living death—for such was prison life to John Blaine, a gentleman born. Not that landed estates and golden coins were his at birth, or would come to him by inheritance, but that it was gentle blood that flowed within the veins of the squalling infant, who first opened his gray-blue eyes upon a bleak and cruel world in a poor tenement in Water street, New York.

And when we say "gentle blood," we mean not that some feudal despot, in the olden time, had laid the knightly sword upon the shoulder of an iron-handed soldier, red-stained with gore, and bade him "Rise up, Sir John Blaine," then gave unto him broad acres wrested by the sword's might from the rightful owners. No!

John Blaine's father was a seaman bold, whose boast in his cups was, "A wife in every port!"

His mother, a poor, weak girl—a child of Erin's green isle—the daughter of a buxom dame, who kept a sailor's boarding-house. The girl had believed the sailor's tale of love, and had married him.



A short month of wedded life; then John Blaine sailed away and never came back again, and eight months more, Heaven, that gave the child to earth, took the mother's life in payment.

We say John Blaine was a gentleman born, though the blood of an Irish lass and a sailor wild commingled in his veins.

All men are not born equal in this world, however free they may be.

Gold and land cannot buy blood. It takes time and culture.

Some men are born to rule others. Cromwell

came from the people, Napoleon from the Corsican peasants, and the Thracian slave made the purple-blooded lords of Rome tremble within their walled town.

We employ choice cattle to improve our stock; the blood once in the herd is sure to show though years may come and go.

Not surer than the salmon to its native river will the blood show traces of its spring.

And some far-distant ancestor of rough John Blaine, the father, had been a gentleman born, light of foot, nimble of finger, and skilled in the courtly

graces that win women's hearts, and in John Blaine, the son, that gentle ancestor lived again. The "blood" had "sported back" and showed the gentle strain infused into the race, latent till now.

"Assault with intent to kill!"

So read the accusation and so ran the charge for which John Blaine got five years of prison life in Sing-Sing's gloomy walls.

Found guilty, and sentenced quickly, too, for John Blaine was poor and friendless. He had not a hundred thousand dollars at his back to fee learned counsel to find a way to break the meshes of the law, and let loose the caged bird; to induce witnesses to swear "that white was black, and black no color at all," or stop the mouth and dull the memory of those whose evidence was dangerous to his liberty; to induce newspapers—reliable oracles!—to manufacture public opinion and call aloud for an acquittal; to—tell it not in Gath!—buy corrupt judges and venal jurors.

John Blaine could accomplish none of these things, nor was he even a ward politician, whose services might come in play at election time, and so he suffered. And yet he was really innocent. He had simply tried to protect himself from a foe who had hunted him down solely to take his life. For years John Blaine had fled from that foe; had crossed the broad ocean twice to avoid him, and then had come suddenly face to face with him at midnight on Broadway. He had seen the knife glitter in the gaslight, aimed to take his life. With the blind desperation of the wild beast at bay he had closed in upon his assailant.

A wrestle and a tumble to the sidewalk, then a whirl over and over, like two huge snakes, and then John Blaine had risen from the ground, pale and panting with exertion, the bloody knife in his hand.

What wonder that they proved the charge when the stricken man swore that he had been unexpectedly attacked, and that he had never seen his assailant before.

And now, in his prison-cell, John Blaine was waiting and watching for the gloom of the twilight to come.

Why should the convict watch and wait? What was darkness more than the light to him?

Listen and we shall learn, for the prisoner in the cell and the convict at the window are conversing together, although the keepers were hardly twenty paces from them.

"Will the darkness ever come?" John Blaine muttered, his face pressed against the iron bars.

"Patience," said the water-carrier, in the same guarded tone, his back to the corridor and his face to the grating.

"All is understood?" Blaine asked.

"Yes; in ten minutes at the most the keepers will be away, and then we'll escape from this cursed hole," the other replied.

Can you wonder that John Blaine prayed that the lagging footsteps of old father Time might be quickened when he knew that, with the dusk of the twilight he could bid farewell to the convict's cell and join again the great life-current, whose tidal wave had cast him wrecked upon an iron shore?

But, even as the convict prayed for the moment of escape, across his mind came the dark remembrance of the terrible foe, who had the scent of the bloodhound and the heart of the wolf.

Within Sing-Sing's walls he was safe from that foe; but free, again the old struggle would begin.

The lips of the convict came tightly together, and a dark, ominous look came over his face.

"Let him look out for himself!" he muttered, fiercely. "If he comes after me again, I swear I'll not fly from him, as I have always done, as if he had been the destroying angel. Now, I'll strike him down as I would a mad-dog. Two years of torture have I spent within these walls. Better liberty, even though the shadow of death hangs ever over my life."

Then, as the great red sun sunk down behind the far-off hills of Rockland county, a sudden alarm came from the hospital, which drew away the three keepers in hot haste. Hardly had they left the corridor when the convict, who had been gazing out of the window, sprang to the cell numbered 40. Drawing a key from his pocket, he unlocked the door, and John Blaine stepped out into the corridor, free.

The dusk of the evening was gathering, fast and the light in the corridor was growing dim.

The two convicts rushed to the north window. They laid hold of the iron bars and easily wrenched them from their places; no miracle this, for a file's sharp teeth had sapped the strength of the iron; all preparations had been made; John Blaine's wit had foreseen every thing.

Through the window, six feet to the frozen ground, and the two convicts were free.

Returning from the false alarm given from the hospital, the three keepers came again to the corridor.

As it was now quite dark, one of the keepers proceeded to light the gas, when, to his astonishment, it would not burn. One of the men was at once dispatched to notify the warden, another went to examine the meter, while the third proceeded to light the dark-lanterns which were sometimes used about the corridors and other places to detect "stowaways;" but, to his wonder, he could not light them, and on a closer examination, he found that they had been tampered with in a most ingenious manner. All the wicks had been clipped short inside, the cap having been unscrewed and taken off for that purpose, thus rendering it necessary to put in new wicks, which would take up much time.

This little discovery alarmed the keeper, and he at once concluded that there had either been an escape, or else that a general revolt was about to be inaugurated.

By this time the warden had arrived, and upon learning that both the gas and the lanterns had been tampered with, came at once to the opinion that something unusual was transpiring, and ordered a general alarm.

An attempt was made to ring the bell, but the rope had been cut through to one strand, and that snapped.

And all this time the fugitives were flying at their topmost speed. The time of escape had been well selected. Sunday had been chosen, because of the general quiet on that day about the prison, and besides, no telegraphic communication could be had except with Poughkeepsie, Albany and New York.

By the warden's orders, a general examination of the convicts was made, and then it was discovered that two were missing.

This took time, and it was a full hour before the bell-rope was repaired, the alarm rung, and the armed keepers dispatched in search of the fugitives.

The general belief was that the convicts had crossed the river, now securely bridged with ice, and had taken refuge in the woods of Rockland county.

Some few, though, expressed the opinion that a horse and sleigh, containing disguises to hide the prison garb, had been in waiting, and that the fugitives had gone inland instead of crossing the river.

But neither the armed prison guards nor the villagers, who, alarmed by the clang of the bell, had hastened with arms in their hands to the prison, under the belief that a general revolt had taken place, could discover any traces of the convicts, though they scoured the country thoroughly for ten miles around the village.

The brain that had planned the well-contrived escape from the prison walls had also thought of a way to elude pursuit.

John Blaine and the water-carrier, Jimmy Kent, were not recaptured.

The New York afternoon journals of Monday contained a full account of the affair, and glaring "head-lines" announced:

"ESCAPED FROM SING-SING!"

"JOHN BLAINE AND JIMMY KENT!"

Then followed a detailed account.

On Monday evening, a yellow-haired, blue-eyed beauty was dressing for a ball in a luxuriantly-furnished chamber in a palatial mansion on Madison avenue, near Fortieth street.

The spoiled darling of wealth and luxury entwined a rose amid the wavy threads of her flaxen-hair, and with a smile of delight upon her fair young face, leaned forward to see her pictured image in the mirror. And as she lightly rested her plump, white arms upon the marble slab, and pressed her little hands against her cheeks, her eyes fell upon the columns of a newspaper which had been idly cast down upon the bureau.

A cry of horror came from the full red lips as she read aloud the printed lines:

"Escaped from Sing-Sing, John Blaine!"

A moment she gazed like one transfixed, and then the little hands compressed the low, white forehead and in utter despair she murmured:

"John Blaine at liberty! Oh! Heaven have mercy upon me!"

Another scene: the parlor of a fashionable uptown hotel, just after supper.

A knot of the regular boarders were gathered around the piano, at which a brilliant-looking girl of twenty-five, with an olive complexion, black hair and great lustrous gray-blue eyes, was playing with exquisite skill. Her costly dress and the magnificent diamonds which she wore plainly suggested that she was highly favored by fortune.

Two gentlemen standing near the piano were engaged in conversation, and as the music softened into a "piano" passage, a single sentence came to the ears of the beautiful girl.

A single sentence only:

"Escaped from Sing-Sing, John Blaine."

And then suddenly the music stopped, the handsome head swayed down upon the instrument as though the fair girl had been stricken with palsy.

A dozen sprang forward to assist her. A strong arm raised her up. She had fainted. Under the skillful care of the ladies she soon revived, but then pleaded that a sudden faintness had come upon her—that she felt strangely unwell, and withdrew to her own apartment. Not one within the parlor guessed the cause of the sudden illness.

Change we now from the parlor of the palace-like hotel to a little room on the top story of one of the great tenement-houses on Fourteenth street, near Third Avenue.

A dark-haired, dark-eyed girl, with a delicate, lady-like face, lit up by great, honest gray eyes, was busy at a sewing machine. The large basket at her feet, heaped with cloth, told that she was a seamstress—one of the great multitude who cheat starvation by making shirts at ten cents apiece.

And just as the clock struck seven, into the room, light as a sunbeam and quick as a grasshopper, danced a lithe young girl, slender and supple as a willow, with quick gray-blue eyes and dark-brown hair. In her hand she held a newspaper—"The News."

"Oh, May!" she exclaimed, breathlessly, "two of the convicts have escaped from Sing-Sing, John Blaine and—"

But "Chocolate" proceeded no further with her speech, for the face of the sewing-girl whitened, and a single exclamation came from her lips as her head sunk down on the sewing-machine table:

"Escaped? Oh heaven!"

And now still another scene, the last.

A ward in the lunatic asylum on Blackwell's Island.

Pacing up and down the room a poor, harmless lunatic, who had been found wandering about the streets of New York, some two years before the time of which we write, and had been conveyed to the asylum.

He answered to the name of "Joe." That was all the information that could be obtained from him. He rarely spoke, and avoided questions; but he was ready, even eager, to perform any little task that might be assigned to him, and so in time he came to be looked upon more as one of the asylum attendants than a patient. In person, "Joe" was about the medium height, and slightly built.

Two of the attendants entered the ward. One had just returned from New York, and was relating to the other the account of the wonderful escape of the two convicts from Sing-Sing, as given in the evening papers.

Joe, pacing up and down, his arms behind him, as was his usual custom, paid no attention to the two, until a single sentence fell upon his ears:

"Escaped from Sing-Sing, John Blaine."

And then a sudden and wonderful change came over the lunatic.

He halted abruptly in his walk, stared around him for a moment, then rubbed his eyes as though he had just awakened from a deep slumber. His gaze fell upon the two attendants, who were watching him in utter astonishment.

Joe walked over to where they stood, and laid his hand upon the shoulder of one of them.

"See here, my friend," he asked, speaking like one in full possession of all his senses, "did I understand you to say just now that John Blaine had escaped from Sing-Sing?"

For a few moments the man was too astonished to speak, but finally he managed to reply:

"Yes; there's a full account in the evening papers."

Then Joe looked around again, evidently perplexed.

"This beats chicken-fighting!" he muttered. "See here, just let me out, will you?"

The escape of John Blaine from Sing-Sing prison had strangely affected three young girls and a poor, harmless madman.

CHAPTER II.

THE GLASS-BLOWERS' BALL.

In front of a public hall on Fifth avenue, in the city of New York, stood a bill-board. The light from the street gas-lamp shining down upon it, revealed a large yellow poster, which announced, in flaring type, framed in a black oval, ornamented by yellow stars, that the "Bohemian Troupe of Glass-Blowers, under the direction of Professor Nichols, would appear in one of their pleasing entertainments, concluding with a social hop."

Two young men, well, even elegantly dressed, coming up the avenue, had their attention attracted by the show-bill, and stopped to examine it.

The two young men were widely different in appearance. One was tall and straight, the other short and inclined to fatness.

The first was known as Carlisle Stewart, the second as Napoleon Weathers.

Stewart was a handsome fellow, with jet-black hair and eyes, and a massive, square-set face, where on pride and hauteur were strongly written. Stewart's father, a thrifty Scotchman, had emigrated to America when quite a young man, embarked in trade, accumulated a colossal fortune, and, dying, bequeathed it to his only son.

The father had come of a good family, and had constantly impressed upon the mind of the son that he came of the best blood in Scotland and that he was the heir to a million.

But Carlisle Stewart was no spoiled child of fortune, for Stewart, the father, was a shrewd, practical man. He had known what poverty was, and the rise to wealth had not turned his brain. He had made his money slowly, had worked hard for it, and had given and received many an ugly blow in the struggle for fortune.

He had bestowed upon his son an excellent education, and then placed him in the office of an eminent New York lawyer, to study for the Bar. Just a year before his death he had had the satisfaction of seeing his son admitted to practice.

Carlisle's companion was a decided contrast to him, yet the two young men were bosom friends.

Weathers was a short, jolly-looking fellow, with a round, shining face, bright blue eyes, light hair, yellow side-whiskers, and a general expression of thorough good nature. Like his friend, he was very wealthy, and also without parents. His father, a shrewd Yankee from Maine, had made a fortune in a soap manufactory. A man whose education had been none of the best, he had determined that his boy should lack none of the advantages that money could procure.

At college Weathers and Stewart had met. The cold, reserved student and the warm-hearted, jolly "fat boy," as Weathers was generally denominated, had each taken a wonderful fancy to the other. And when they left college, and went out into the world, Stewart to study law, and Weathers to take charge of his father's soap-factory, which was situated up on the banks of the Hudson river, just above Yonkers, the friendship continued. After the death of his father, Weathers had disposed of a half interest in the manufactory to the foreman, taken him into partnership, and thus withdrawn himself from all active interest in the business.

"Hold on a moment, Carlisle!" Weathers exclaimed, his attention attracted by the show-bill; "what's this?"

"An exhibition of some sort," the other replied.

Then both stopped and read the bill attentively.

"I say, 'Lile'—Weathers's familiar term for Stewart—"let us go in for a little while. I never saw anything like this. There's a 'social hop,' too. I haven't been to a ball for a month."

"Oh, nonsense!" and Stewart's proud lip curled in contempt.

"But see here, 'Lile; I've an idea of going into literature, and if I'm ever going to emulate Dickens or Collins, I must see life, you know," Weathers said, earnestly.

Stewart laughed; the idea pleased him.

"Very well; go ahead then."

So the two proceeded up-stairs.

They paid their money at the office, received their tickets, then gave them to the doorkeeper, and received in return two checks bearing four numbers each, chances for the prizes which were to be distributed during the evening, as the doorkeeper explained.

On entering the hall, the two found quite a number of people assembled. At four different stands the glass-blowers were in active operation, each one surrounded by a curious group. A steam engine, constructed entirely of glass, was working industriously at the further end of the hall. The people assembled would compare favorably in character with the average attendance at any of the places of public amusement in the city. Young folks were largely in the ascendant. Working girls, with their fresh, young faces, attended by young men whose faces and hands betrayed the mechanic, composed the majority of the throng.

The two friends sauntered carelessly about the room, noting the various pretty girls assembled around the stands occupied by the glass-blowers.

And, standing by one of the platforms, two girls

attracted the attention of Stewart. He quietly directed Weathers's attention to them.

"If you are looking for a heroine in humble life, there she is," Stewart said.

"By Jinks! she is pretty!" Weathers exclaimed.

The girls were plainly dressed, one in black, the other in green. The one in black was a little taller than the other, and the better looking of the two, her features being more regular. She was a little below the medium height, slender figure, great, gray eyes, an oval, spiritual face, wearing ever a pensive expression, which seemed to tell of some hidden sorrow. A wealth of dark-brown hair crowned the shapely head. Her companion was slighter in figure, and not quite so tall; her face was less perfect in its outline, and her gray-blue eyes smaller, but they were as bright and sharp as the orbs of a squirrel. The first was called Mary Martin, the second Mary Crofkin; and as they lived together, two poor orphans, they were generally termed the "Two Marys" by their acquaintances.

And while the two friends stood regarding the young maids, who were unconscious of the scrutiny, the proprietor of the exhibition announced that the "gifts" would now be distributed. The glass-blowers "shut up shop," and the audience gathered in front of the platform, at the further end of the hall.

Then the wheel of fortune went round and the printed slips were drawn forth, and the presents distributed to those of the audience who were lucky enough to hold the corresponding numbers. This proceeding over, the manager, who was Mr. Nichols in person, a brisk, dapper gentleman, in black, with a white vest, drew on a pair of white kid gloves and announced that the entertainment would now conclude with a social hop, and called upon the ladies and gentlemen to take partners for a quadrille. Then, descending to the floor, he exerted himself to form the sets.

As nearly every lady in the room had a gentleman with her, this was not a difficult matter.

The two girls and the two young men had retired to a corner of the hall to observe the scene.

The industrious floor-manager, needing two "sides" to fill out a set, cast his eyes upon the four in the corner, and instantly made a descent upon these two young men.

"We need just two more couples here," he said; "of course you'll dance. Here are some nice partners for you," and with his eyes he indicated the two girls.

"But, we are not acquainted," Stewart said, in remonstrance. He was not much of a dancing man at the best, and the idea of figuring upon the floor of a public hall, with a strange partner, was not particularly agreeable to him.

"Oh, nonsense!" cried Nichols, who would listen to no refusal; "you're both gentlemen, I'm sure, and they are two nice girls. I'll introduce you." And, without giving time for further remonstrance, he passed his arms through the arms of the two young men and drew them over to where the two girls were sitting. They looked up in astonishment as Nichols addressed them.

"Good-evening, ladies!" he said, smilingly. "Permit me to introduce two friends of mine, who are trying for the honor of dancing with you. Miss Johnston, Mr. Van Buren," and he presented Stewart to the dark-eyed beauty. "Miss Comfort, Mr. Montgomery," as he presented Weathers to the other. "And now, this way, please; you are both in the same set," and Nichols, without giving any of the party time to utter a word in remonstrance, laid hold of Stewart's arm and almost forced him into the set, then waved his hand in the air as a signal for the band to play, and the quadrille began.

Stewart and his partner felt that it was too late to retreat, and took their assigned place. As for Weathers, he was delighted; he rather prided himself on his dancing abilities, and was so thoroughly democratic as to be able to make himself at home anywhere; and, too, he rather liked the looks of his partner. Not that she was what could be called a pretty girl, but she looked "smart," to use the old Yankee expression, with her bright eyes and pleasant smile—one of the kind of girls with no nonsense about them, as Weathers would have said, had he put his thoughts into words. And as for "Chocolate," Mary Crofkin's "pet" name, she had carefully surveyed Weathers for a moment with her sharp eyes, mentally set him down as a "real nice fellow," and was perfectly satisfied to dance with him. This was really flattering to the young man, for Chocolate, lively and wild as she was with her acquaintances, was quite a particular person, with a good strong will of her own, and she would have had no scruples in flatly refusing to dance had she objected to the partner selected.

The quadrille went on, and in its pauses the two couples, who had thus been so abruptly brought together, got into conversation. Stewart discovered that his partner was not only very pretty but also very ladylike, while Weathers was in the seventh heaven of delight with the lively "Chocolate," who appeared in his eyes to be the best natured and most sensible girl that he had ever seen.

As the music ceased, so the influence of the music and the dance banished the reserve between the two young ladies and their partners.

When the music ceased and they retired to their seats by the wall, the four felt as if they were old friends.

A polka followed the quadrille, then a waltz, and then another square dance.

As both the girls were passionately fond of dancing, and the two young men were not only experts in that delightful art, but had become decidedly interested in their partners, they did not allow these opportunities to become better acquainted with them to escape.

But, when the "Lancers" had finished, Mary inquired the time. It wanted a quarter to ten.

"We must be going," Mary said.

The two young men accompanied the girls to the door, and there discovered that it was raining quite hard.

"Wait a moment!" cried Weathers, prompt to act in an emergency, and he ran out in the rain.

In five minutes he was back with two umbrellas.

"If you will permit us, we shall be proud to escort you home," he said, gallantly.

Mary looked at "Chocolate," then into Stewart's face, and in his eyes she read that it would give him

pleasure to act as her escort; and, womanlike, she consented. Already she was trying to please the man who, but a short hour before, had been an utter stranger to her.

It was some fifteen or twenty blocks from the hall to the tenement-house in Fourteenth street, where the two girls resided, but it seemed only a little way that night to all of them, although the streets were dark and muddy, and the rain poured steadily.

At the door of the house the young men bid the girls "good-night," and then went back toward Broadway to take a car up-town.

Stewart was strangely moody, while Weathers was in a delightful humor.

"That girl is as smart as a steel-trap!" he cried, emphatically. "She's a little bit of a thing, too, isn't larger than a pint of cider." Then he noticed the abstraction of his friend. "What's the matter, 'Lile? You seem as gloomy as a first-class graveyard. Didn't you enjoy yourself? I thought that you were quite struck with the great, gray eyes of that beauty."

"That's the trouble," Stewart replied, abruptly. "I am interested in the girl. I talked more to her in this one little hour to-night than I have ever done in a day to any other woman."

"I don't understand; what's the trouble?"

"We are rich and these girls are poor. Every bit of bread that goes into their mouths they earn by the toil of their little fingers. I asked Mary—that's the name of the one I danced with—if we might call upon her and her friend; they have a room in common. She looked in my eyes for a moment, then replied, slowly, 'Yes.'"

"Well, that's all right!" Weathers exclaimed; "I asked my girl the same thing and she replied, 'Yes, if her companion was willing.' By jinks! I'm going, too. I like this bright-eyed little witch, with her sharp, independent ways, better than any girl I've seen in a dog's age."

"Weathers," and as Stewart spoke, he laid his hand upon the arm of the other, "we are both gentlemen, I trust."

"Well, yes, I believe we are," Weathers said, rather astonished at this beginning.

"We are both wealthy, of good family; we can not think of marrying these girls. Is it wise, then, to visit them? to excite hopes in their minds that can never be realized? and I trust that we are both honest enough not to wish to harm these girls. I speak frankly to you, as I would not speak to any other living soul. I have seen something in that girl's eyes to-night which tells me that, if we are allowed the opportunity, we shall love each other."

"Hang it! Marry her, then!" cried Weathers, abruptly.

"I think that my father would rise up out of his grave to prevent my marrying a sewing-girl," Stewart said, coldly. "In his lifetime his thought was that I should make a brilliant match and revive the old glories of our family in Bonnie Scotland."

"A brilliant match!" and Weathers turned up his fat nose in contempt; "that means a girl whose only idea in life is to wear better clothes and bigger diamonds than her neighbor. 'Not for Joe,' I say, my dear Stewart. I am of the people; my greenbacks smell of the soap-fat by which they were made; I want a wife, not a doll to dress up. My mother used to be a hired girl, in Maine, before my father married her, and I ain't ashamed of it, either. Stewart, you're the most sensible and level-headed man that I know of except when you get on this strain about good blood. You reason that lots of money means high descent and good breeding, when half the time it only signifies downright rascality and dumb luck. Now, I'm as rich as you, but you can trace back your family-line to Montrose, the great marquis, while it has always been my private belief that my great, great grandfather was either hung or ought to have been. Now, this little girl suits me; there is something about her that reminds me of the sparkle of champagne; it's exhilarating. There's a freshness and honesty about her that it's pretty hard to find nowadays. I don't believe that she could tell a lie, even if she wanted to."

Stewart smiled sadly at his friend's rhapsody.

"You look only at the present, I at the future," he said. "My wife must be a companion for me. It would be a terrible disappointment if, after marriage, I should discover I had only won a household drudge with a pretty face."

"You'll never find out what the girl is like unless you get acquainted with her," Weathers urged. "Come; promise that you'll call on them with me, some night this week."

"There is danger both for her and myself," Stewart replied, slowly.

"Oh, nonsense!" exclaimed his friend. "You can back out easy enough if you find that she don't suit you."

"Well, I'll go with you," Stewart said, reluctantly, "but it is against my better judgment."

The two proceeded up-town. They occupied a suite of rooms together, at the Grand Hotel.

And as Stewart closed his eyes in slumber, an hour later, the great gray eyes of Mary Martin seemed gazing again upon him.

And the two girls, as they nestled together in their narrow bed, that night, their thoughts, as slumber's chain came upon them, were of the pale face of Stewart and the laughing blue eyes of his friend.

CHAPTER III.

THE WOLVES.

THE lager-beer garden on Broadway known as the Pavilion was brilliantly lighted up, and an excellent orchestra discoursed most exquisite music as the followers of King Gambrinus discussed their lager.

The little tables were well surrounded by bearded Germans, with here and there a sprinkling of other nationalities, and the clink of the beer-mugs mingled with the silvery notes of the music.

At one of the tables nearest to the door sat two men, as great a contrast to each other as they both were to the brawny Germans by whom they were surrounded.

One was young, the other of middle age.

The young man, dressed in the extreme of fashion, was a handsome fellow, with a short, full face, yellow curling locks, full blue eyes, and a pointed mustache and imperial of the same hue as his hair.

Quite a lady-killer was Elbert Van Tromp, a scion of one of the old New York families, and the cousin

of the spoiled beauty whom we described in our first chapter as dressing for the ball, and who was so strangely affected on reading the account of John Blaine's escape from Sing-Sing prison.

The middle-aged man who sat opposite to Van Tromp was a tall, slender individual, dressed entirely in black, and who affected a youthful air utterly at variance with his appearance. His glossy silk hat was set jauntily on one side of his head, and the curly locks which came from under the hat were jet-black in color, as were also the huge "mutton-chop" side-whiskers which adorned his unnaturally white cheeks.

A stranger would have guessed at once that the man wore a wig and that the whiskers were unnaturally dyed.

This gentleman was commonly known as Captain Gorman O'Shane, and his semi-military bearing gave rise to the legend that at one time he had held a commission in the English service.

Captain O'Shane was a mystery to the world at large. He was always dressed tolerably well and always appeared to be in funds, yet no one knew of his being concerned in any business or occupation whatsoever.

When questioned upon this point, by some young gentleman, with more curiosity than discretion, the gallant captain, cocking his hat still more on one side of his head, and swinging his little switch cane in the air, would reply, with the faintest touch of the "brogue" in the world:

"I have a family estate, me b'y, in Ireland, and, bedad! I'd go back there if it wasn't for a little 'fin-igan' business in '68."

And this was all the information that the captain would vouchsafe to give.

Elbert Van Tromp and Captain Gorman O'Shane were quite intimate—a fact which rather helped to establish the captain's position.

The two men had just entered the Pavilion, having met at the doorway as if by appointment, which really was the case.

"I am on time, me b'y," the captain said, after they had got fairly seated and the waiter had been dispatched for the lagers.

"Yes," Van Tromp replied. There was an earnest expression upon the face of Elbert which was not natural to it, and the captain quickly perceived that something was amiss.

"You're out of sorts, my darlint," the Irishman observed.

"Yes; I'm in a hobble. As the old saying is, 'I've about come to the end of my rope.'"

"Short of the filthy lucre, me b'y?" the captain suggested.

"Exactly," Elbert replied, his face gloomy, and he caressed the ends of his long imperial reflectively. "You and I, O'Shane, have run in double harness now for about two years, and, of course, you understand my position pretty well. The world at large thinks that I am a wealthy man, when in reality I am but little better than a beggar."

"But you are the guardian of Miss Ernestine, me jewel; can't you use a little of her money, and try another whack at fortune?"

"My dear captain, the brilliant idea that has just occurred to you struck me some time ago, and I rather pride myself upon being quick to improve favorable opportunities. I have used some of my cousin's money. I forsook cards and dice to dabble a little in Wall street, and the result is that I am just about ten thousand dollars short."

"The devil ye are!" the captain exclaimed, in amazement.

"Yes, and that is not the worst of it," Van Tromp said, with a serious face; "Ernestine comes of age in just four months, and then I shall have to render an account of my stewardship."

"Oh, murder! but she'll not be hard on yees, for it's a foine little girl she is."

"That's not the question!" Van Tromp exclaimed, impatiently. "You don't seem to understand that I have some little pride. I don't relish the idea of going to Ernestine like a whipped hound, and saying, 'My dear cousin, I have used ten thousand dollars of your money; will you forgive me, and give me time to pay it back?'"

"Faith! it would be ugly!"

"Exactly; another point, too: Ernestine has got half a million coming to her—more than she can ever use. Now, I think that it is a shame I can't have fifty or sixty thousand out of it for myself."

"By the powers!" cried the captain, quickly; "I have it, me b'y. Marry the girl and take all."

"Unfortunately that cannot be done," Van Tromp replied, coldly. "That remarkably brilliant idea occurred to me some time ago, but after a month's trial, I was obliged to reluctantly admit that there wasn't the least possible chance of making my dainty cousin fall in love with me. She's got a tinge of romance in her composition, and has already set up in her mind's eye the ideal of her future husband, and your humble servant doesn't answer the description at all."

"Can't you find somebody else with a few hundred thousand dollars, me b'y, that'll be after making a happy man of ye?" asked the captain.

"Yes; I have already found such a party," Van Tromp replied, quietly.

"The devil ye have!" exclaimed the Irishman, in astonishment. "Oh, corn in Agyp! Sure, you'll come out to the fore, after all."

"Yes, but the affair will take time. I was only introduced to the girl a week ago. She is of French descent and an heiress. What the figure is I don't know, but her diamonds are magnificent. She boards at the Hoffman House."

"I'll go bail you'll do the trick!" the captain exclaimed.

"I think that the chances are favorable," Van Tromp rejoined, confidently. "But, for the scheme in regard to my cousin in which I need your aid. Have you found such a man as I described to you?"

"Yes; as correct, my jewel, as if he had been made to order. He is to be here at half-past eight."

"Now for my scheme; Ernestine is young, impressive; has never loved in all her life. If I can find a young, good-looking fellow with the manner of a gentleman, introduce him to Ernestine, give him all opportunities to press his suit, the chances are ten to one that he will win her."

"By me soul I don't see how that will benefit you."

"Not if the gentleman signs a bond of fifty thou-

sand dollars, payable to me one week after his marriage?" asked Van Tromp, meaningly.

"Oh, by the powers! It's a wise head ye have!" exclaimed the captain in admiration. "It's Claude Melnotte and the Lady of Lyons over again."

"Yes, something the same idea. But what sort of a man have you picked out?"

"He's a born devil, me b'y, among the girls," replied the captain. "His name is Alexander Blackie. He was captain in one of the New York regiments during the war, but he drinks like the devil. If he'd only have whisky alone he'd be a foine b'y."

"Can we depend upon him to keep sober long enough to answer our purpose?" Van Tromp asked, anxiously.

"I think so. Bedad! I'll look after him meself."

"But will he consent to act as our tool in this matter?"

"I think that the chances are that he will. I met him last night on Broadway, and the poor devil had neither a place to sleep nor a rap to buy himself a bite or a sup of whisky. And the murdering blaggard was as cool and aisy as if he owned New York."

"He's good-looking?"

"Bedad he is!" cried O'Shane, decidedly; "but there he is now," he added, as a man came through the red doors which barred the way to the street.

The new-comer was about the medium height. He was dressed quite poorly in a dark suit, which showed evident signs of long wear. The face of the man was strikingly handsome; an almost perfect oval, long, straight nose, large, clear, brown eyes, a silken mustache and imperial almost perfect in their form. Around the high, white forehead, the rich, dark-brown hair clustered in little curls. The man's whole appearance told of carelessness and want, and yet there was something in his bearing which revealed the gentleman.

A moment he glanced around the saloon, then perceived the captain seated at the table. A peculiar bright smile appeared on his thin pale features, which seemed to make the face ten years younger; and he approached in his graceful, careless way. He could not have appeared more at his ease if he had been clad in broadcloth and fine linen, instead of threadbare woolen.

The captain saluted him, introduced Van Tromp, and then invited him to be seated.

Van Tromp surveyed the stranger carefully, and guessed at once that he was a peculiar, odd fellow, widely different from the common run of mankind.

Another glass of lager was ordered for Blackie, who sipped it with careless ease, and then Van Tromp proceeded at once to business.

"Mr. Blackie, how would you like to be married?"

"A wife is the very thing I want," Blackie replied. "I find it deuced hard to take care of myself, and I really think that I need a wife to take care of me."

CHAPTER IV. THE COMPACT.

"You are perfectly willing to take a wife, then?" Van Tromp asked, while O'Shane drummed carelessly with his fingers on the table, and looked approvingly at Blackie.

"Yes, provided that the lady is agreeable to me," Blackie replied.

"Agreeable to you?" Van Tromp said, just a little astonished.

"Of course; you wouldn't have a man marry a woman unless he liked her, would you?" Blackie demanded.

"Hear the thafe of the world!" O'Shane exclaimed in astonishment. "Sure you couldn't spake more aisy if you were the heir to a million."

"Beggars shouldn't be choosers," Van Tromp observed, tersely, and with quite a touch of sarcasm in his tone.

Blackie gave Van Tromp just a single glance with his cool, brown eyes, contracted his brows just a little, then raised the beer mug and drained off the lager at a single draught, and rose to his feet.

"Ta, ta, gentlemen," he said, in his cool, easy way, and turned upon his heel to depart.

"What the devil's the matter wid ye?" cried O'Shane, in alarm, springing to his feet and laying hold of Blackie's arm. "Wait a bit; sure we've business to talk wid ye."

"O'Shane, my boy, you have surely made some mistake. Two gentlemen of high estate like yourself and friend cannot have any business to transact with a poor miserable 'beggar' like your humble servant," and Blackie bowed in mock humility.

"Pon me soul, Mr. Van Tromp, it's an apology ye owe Mr. Blackie for that careless expression," and O'Shane winked significantly at Van Tromp.

It was a bitter pill for that gentleman to swallow, but the single look that he had received from Blackie had convinced him that he had got hold of a difficult subject to deal with.

"I trust that Mr. Blackie will believe that I did not mean to wound his feelings, and that I freely and fully recall the offensive remark," Van Tromp said. The speech was delivered just a little stiffly, for, to confess himself in the wrong was not an easy matter for the haughty young New Yorker.

"Sure, that settles the matter!" O'Shane exclaimed. "Bedad! a gentleman couldn't ask for more. Sit down, Alex, ould b'y, and have another glass of lager while we explain the matter to ye. Don't act like a contrary cow, and kick over the milk-pail. It's a fortune we'd be after puttin' in your way, me jewel!"

Blackie bowed gracefully, in token that the *amende honorable* had fully satisfied him, and resumed his seat at the table. Three more glasses of beer were called for, and again the negotiation went on.

"Now to business; we've the finest gurl for ye that the sun ever looked upon!" exclaimed O'Shane, extravagantly; "and she's an heiress, too; half a million, me b'y, in clane cash."

Blackie elevated his eyebrows slightly.

"And you propose to throw this 'foine' girl and her half a million into my lap?" he said, incredulously.

"That's the programme," Van Tromp replied, carelessly.

"Now, me jewel, see what a prize ye would have been after turning your back on, ye blaggard!"

"Gentlemen, I confess I am really at a loss to guess why I have been selected as the future hus-

band of this half million, and the girl attached thereto," Blackie said, just a little astonished.

"Wait till a while ago, and we'll explain the matter to ye!" O'Shane exclaimed, with a triumphant smile, and just then the beer arrived. "Take hould of yer glass, ye murderin' devil, ye, and we drink long life and happiness to Mr. and Mrs. Alexander Blackie."

Then the three clinked the glasses and drank.

"Now to come to a perfect understanding," Van Tromp said. "Are you free to marry?"

For a moment Blackie hesitated; a cloud came over his face, but he soon recovered himself.

"Yes, I am free," he said, slowly.

But the sharp eyes of the two conspirators had noted the expression of sadness, slight as it was, and a look of alarm passed between them.

"See here, my b'y!" exclaimed O'Shane, anxiously, "it's no joke we're after in this matter. Let us know the truth, for devil a foot can we budge if you are not a free man."

"Why should you think that I am not?" Blackie demanded.

"Faix! there's something in your face which seems to say that your mind's not aisy on that point."

"Mr. Blackie, I am sure that you will not do either my friend or myself the injustice to suppose that we are children," Van Tromp said, seriously. "If you are not a free man, able to contract a legal marriage, our interview need proceed no further."

For a few moments Blackie was silent, and drummed listlessly on the side of the beer glass with his fingers, and seemed lost in thought; then suddenly he raised his head.

"Gentlemen, to use our old western term, I believe that you mean business; and since you have seen fit to make advances to me, it is but right that I should deal frankly with you in return," he said, slowly. "I am free to marry, legally, though not perhaps morally. Some years ago I met a girl out West. It was just at the close of the war. We became intimate, and in due course of time I asked her to marry me and she consented."

"But the marriage never took place, me b'y?" O'Shane asked, anxiously.

"No; just a week before the day appointed for the ceremony to take place, I became involved in a most disgraceful midnight brawl—I was wild with liquor at the time—in which two men were dangerously hurt. At the time it was thought that one would never recover. I was obliged to fly for my life. I went down to Texas, and remained there two years before I dared to return to the North. When I came back, the girl had disappeared. I had written two or three letters to her during my absence, but never received an answer. She was a wealthy girl, of French descent, and resided in Nashville. Gentlemen, I am a wild, careless dog, and have been all my life; but, wild and reckless as I was, I loved that girl; it was the first and last love of my life. And it's very seldom now that I do not see her face before me just as vividly as in the olden time, when I used to kiss her red lips and look into the depths of her great gray-blue eyes."

"And that's all, me jewel?" O'Shane asked.

"Yes."

"That will not interfere in the least," Van Tromp said. "Now, Mr. Blackie, I will proceed at once to explain. There is a certain lady worth half a million of dollars; she is unmarried. Our idea is to present you to this lady and have you marry her."

"Some old woman, I suppose, who wants to buy a young husband, eh?" Blackie asked.

"No; on the contrary, she is not yet twenty-one, and will not come in possession of her property until she is of age."

"What is the matter with her?" Blackie demanded abruptly. "Is she blind, lame, or disfigured by some terrible disease?"

"Oh! she's an angel, me b'y!" O'Shane exclaimed.

"She is in perfect health, and is as pretty a girl as breathes in New York this night," Van Tromp replied. "In fact, she is my cousin."

"Oh, I understand," Blackie said, significantly. "It's the old game, such as we read of in novels. A husband's name is needed to preserve the family honor, and then the 'happy couple' part at the altar, and that ends the matter."

"My dear Mr. Blackie, you wound me by such an insinuation as that," Van Tromp said, gently. "You are entirely wrong. My cousin, Ernestine, is as pure and good a girl as ever breathed. She has never been in love, in all her life, and she will not marry you unless you can win her affections. In fine, she will know nothing of this arrangement between us at all. I propose to present you to her as an old friend of mine, give you every opportunity to win her love, and, if you succeed and marry her—"

"And then?" asked Blackie, who understood that the motive of this scheme had yet to be revealed.

"After your marriage, when you come into possession of your wife's property, you will pay a note for fifty thousand dollars which I hold and which bears your signature."

"Ah, I understand now," Blackie said, thoughtfully.

"You are a man of the world. You comprehend my ideas upon this subject. I put this transaction entirely upon a business basis, throwing aside all sentiment. I want fifty thousand dollars. I offer you a beautiful girl and a fortune of nearly half a million, if you choose to accept my conditions."

"It's a bargain!" exclaimed Blackie, after a moment's consideration. "But suppose I should not succeed in pleasing the lady?"

"Then the affair must end; but I am willing to take the risk of that," Van Tromp said, confidently.

"I'll go bail, me honey, that you'll be after doing the trick!" O'Shane exclaimed.

"Let us at once to action," Van Tromp said, rising. The other two followed his example, and all three left the saloon.

CHAPTER V.

THE FIRST MOVE.

The tiny clock on the mantle in the room of Ernestine Van Tromp had just struck eight, and the fair-haired girl looked up from the book which she was reading. This was on the evening following the one whereon Van Tromp and O'Shane had met Alex Blackie at the Broadway Pavilion.

Elbert said that he would be home at eight," she murmured, as she glanced at the clock.

Then the sound of his footsteps on the stairs came to her ears, and a moment after he entered the room.

"Ernestine, I've brought you a visitor!" he exclaimed, as he sat down on the lounge by her side.

"Yes?" she said, carelessly.

"An old friend of mine, who has been absent in Texas for quite a time. He has just returned to the city. And, Ernestine, if it would be agreeable to you, I should like to ask him to make our house his home while he remains in New York."

"Why, of course, Elbert; I am sure I shall be happy to receive any friend of yours."

The girl had a very high regard for her cousin, who had always been to her more like a brother than any thing else.

"Will you come down to the parlor and see him?"

"Yes," and the girl rose languidly and laid down her book.

"I am sure you will like him," Elbert said, also rising. Then the two proceeded down-stairs.

Van Tromp ushered Ernestine gallantly into the parlor. A gentleman, clad entirely in black, rose at their approach.

"Miss Van Tromp, allow me to present my old friend, Captain Blackie," Elbert said.

The girl acknowledged the introduction, then raised her eyes to the face of the stranger. One sudden, convulsive throb her heart gave as she looked upon the pale, handsome features of the captain.

A visit to the barber and hairdresser, and an entire new suit of black, had worked a wondrous change in the appearance of the man who, but a day before, had been a homeless outcast.

Blackie looked ten years younger, and as the girl's eyes fell upon his handsome features, now wearing the careless, happy smile which became them so well, her heart acknowledged that for the first time she looked upon a man whom she could love.

The three sat down; and soon became engaged in conversation.

Blackie appeared at his best; his easy self-possession not only impressed the young girl favorably, but really delighted Van Tromp.

"He's a devilish smart fellow," he murmured to himself, "and he'll make Ernestine a capital husband." And, with the thought, his conscience was easier.

And as for the girl, she listened with rapt attention while the young man talked of the wild soldier life in the army, then his experiences on the Texan frontier, and then described a horseback journey through the Louisiana lowlands under the warm rays of a southern sun, and how, in the dusky twilight, he had ridden for miles amid the strange, sweet perfume of the orange groves.

In all her life she had never met such a man. How insipid, how weak, seemed to her now the vapid flatteries of the fashionable butterflies who had paid her court! Like Antony, she might say, "This was a man."

Then, breaking off suddenly, he begged Miss Ernestine to favor him with some music.

The young girl complied shyly; she felt a strange reluctance to display her skill, and yet she was an excellent musician, but, after listening to the fascinating words of Blackie, she felt a distrust of her own powers.

"What shall I play?" she asked, as she seated herself at the piano, and he leaned carelessly on the side of the instrument.

"Oh, anything you like," he replied, gazing intently upon the fair young face with such an earnest look that the girl was fain to evade the glances of the brilliant brown eyes by letting her gaze rest upon the music-sheet.

Then she played, ever and anon raising her head still to encounter the earnest look of the dark eyes. And yet he was not conscious that he was gazing intently upon the girl, for another image than hers was before his eyes; an oval, olive-tinted face—fair type of the warm southern beauty—lighted up by great gray-blue eyes.

And the air, too, the dreamy Kiss Waltz, how often had he stood by her side and listened while the liquid notes flowed softly from her skillful touch!

The music ending alone broke the spell which had bound him to the past.

With a sudden start he seemed to recover himself, and, in his graceful, easy way, complimented the young girl upon her musical skill until the fair face was red with blushes.

"And do you play, captain?" asked Van Tromp, who, from his position on the sofa, had been intently watching the two, and was inwardly rejoicing at the brilliant prospects of fingering fifty thousand dollars.

"Oh, a little," Blackie answered, carelessly, and, in obedience to Ernestine's pressing request, he took her place at the piano and dashed off a lively Spanish air, full of the rattle of the castanets and the jingling mule-bells—a remembrance of the Mexican frontier, as he laughingly explained.

Then the conversation turned upon poetry, and to Van Tromp's astonishment, he discovered that not only was the captain thoroughly acquainted with all the works of the more celebrated poets, but he had also treasured up in his memory many a sweet verse that some nameless songster had given to the world.

And Ernestine, as she sat and listened while Blackie, in low, musical voice, told of love and noble deeds deftly woven into song by the minstrel's cunning brain, thought never in all her life had she looked upon such a man.

The evening passed rapidly away. It was eleven before any one of the three had noted how the time was flying, and then, with a kind good-night, Ernestine retired.

"Well, what do you think of her?" Van Tromp asked.

"She is an angel!" Blackie replied.

"You think so?"

"Yes, I do not think that I have ever looked upon a sweeter or fairer face."

"I noticed, when you were standing by the piano while she was playing, that you seemed entranced," Van Tromp said.

An expression of pain came over Blackie's features.

"You misunderstood me," he replied, slowly. "I was not thinking of her then; I was thinking of the past. The air she played was the favorite one of the woman who was once all the world to me. It brought her back to my memory instantly."

"Where is this woman now?"

Blackie shook his head.

"That is a riddle which I spent a year endeavoring to solve," he said, slowly. "It does not matter much, though. She is dead to me now. She was an exquisite pianist, and many a time has she played that Kiss Waltz for me."

"I think that our scheme will succeed," Van Tromp said, changing the conversation.

"Yes; if you are careful about one thing."

"What is that?"

"Keep liquor away from me," Blackie said, seriously; "don't let me touch a single drop, for if I drink but one glass, I shall not be satisfied until I've had twenty."

"I'll look out for that; but, come, let me show you to your quarters."

And Van Tromp conducted Blackie up-stairs.

Ernestine had retired at once to her room and dismissed her maid, for she wished to be alone with her thoughts.

Drawing up an easy-chair, she sat down in it before the large glass which occupied the space between two of the windows; then drawing out the hair-pins, she allowed her golden locks to float down loosely over her shoulders. With a pensive smile she leaned her cheek upon her hand and looked into the shining mirror.

A single glance and the cheeks grew pale, and the smile faded into a look of horror. She was not alone. The glass reflected back the figure of a man standing in the center of the room.

And that man was John Blaine!

CHAPTER VI.

THE TWO MARYS.

AND just one week from the time when Carlile Stewart and Napoleon Weathers had met the two young workingwomen, Mary Martin and "Chocolate," at the glass-blowers' ball, the two young men at seven o'clock in the evening, found themselves walking down Fourteenth street, toward the house where the two girls resided.

Had it rested with Stewart alone, he would never have seen Mary Martin again except by chance, but Weathers had given his friend no peace; by day and by night he had talked of nothing but their two chance acquaintances.

Stewart had endured the assault until at last he had yielded to his friend's desire, and the two had set out to make their call.

Down the long block they walked, picking their way through the groups of children playing on the sidewalk.

The whole block was in reality one great tenement, although composed of different buildings. But the houses were all alike, six stories high, the door reached by a flight of ten or twelve steps, and in the basement some four or five steps below the level of the street two small shops.

Street, steps and windows were all alive with people, although the night was quite chilly, and the ground was covered with snow and slush.

Stewart had been looking around him with a thoughtful brow at the visible signs of poverty and dire, absolute want.

"Strange! how many thousands in this city are compelled to herd like cattle in these barracks," he said, as they walked onward.

"That's just like you, always moralizing," Weathers observed; "but you haven't the least idea how happy some of the dwellers in these great barracks are. 'Poor and content,' you know. I forgot the rest of it. I'll bet you any thing you like that these two girls in their little room, 'way up at the top of the house, are completely happy.'"

"Perhaps so," Stewart said, shortly.

"This is the house," and Weathers paused.

"How do you know? Did you notice the number the other night? They look all alike to me."

"I remember that lager-beer saloon underneath," Weathers replied, pointing to the little shop, "and let's go in and have some lager before we go up."

"No, my friend, I am not generally in the habit of visiting ladies with the smell of liquor on my lips," Stewart said, gravely.

"You are altogether too good for this world," Weathers retorted. "After you've got up three or four pairs of stairs you'll wish that you had taken my advice, and had some refreshments before you started."

"Three or four pairs of stairs!"

"Yes; there's five altogether; they're on the first floor—next to the roof."

"You understand all about it."

"Oh, yes; I'm the most curious fellow that ever lived, and got all the particulars from my partner the other night. But come, let's go up."

So up the steps and into the house they went. Up the long, narrow stairways, innocent of carpets, through the dimly-lighted halls, until at last they paused on the top story. The next flight of stairs led to the roof.

Weathers and Stewart paused at the head of the stairs. Before them were two doors, the upper panels of which were of ground glass. Through the glass of the left door shone a light. "That's the one," Weathers said, pointing to it. "I remember she said take the door to the left."

Then Weathers advanced to the door and knocked gently.

There was an instant commotion inside; then the door opened and Chocolate appeared.

"Oh!" she cried, her eyes sparkling. "Mary, it's Mr. Montgomery and Mr. Van Buren."

The two young men had never thought of the names under which they had been introduced to the girls at the ball, and had not undeceived them, and, as at the present it seemed rather awkward to attempt to explain, they held their peace and accepted the cordial invitation of the young girl to come in.

They found themselves in a little square room, evidently used as a kitchen; two narrow glass doors led to another room beyond the first, which was lighted up by two windows looking upon the yard of the house. The inner room was the parlor. Another glass door by the side of the one leading into the entry, led to a dark bedroom. Weathers's sharp eyes detected this, as through the crack of the door standing ajar, he saw a bed, and of course guessed that it was the girls' sleeping apartment; but the examination was promptly cut short by Chocolate's

closing the door of the little room when she closed the other.

The other Mary, who, as usual, was busy at the sewing-machine, in the inner room, rose to receive the visitors, and responded in her quiet, lady-like way to the salutation of the two.

The young men being seated, looked around them. The two little apartments were as neat as wax, though almost scantily furnished. By the window, on a little stand, were some half a dozen plants, the majority of which appeared to be dead or dying. Over the plants, in a little cage, was a canary bird. A small chromo, representing a woman senseless and half buried in the snow, while over her stood rescuing angels in the shape of two large dogs of the San Bernard breed—evidently the gift of some weekly newspaper, was tacked, unframed, against the wall over the fireplace. A few other common engravings, cut from the illustrated papers, adorned the walls.

"What cozy little rooms you have here," Weathers said.

"Yes; sky-parlors," Chocolate replied; "they're real nice when you get up to them, and the air in summer is much pleasanter than it is in the lower rooms. It's very hot down-stairs in the summer; about half of the people in the house sleep on the roof on hot nights."

"How many families are there in the house?" Stewart inquired.

"Twenty-four when all the rooms are let," Chocolate replied.

"And counting, say four in a family, that would make nearly a hundred persons in this one house," Stewart observed, in astonishment.

"Oh, yes," the girl replied, quickly; "four is setting it very low. The Irish family that live in next door have eight in the family, and keep two boarders besides."

"Two boarders! ten of them altogether!" exclaimed Weathers. "How the deuce do they all get along?"

"Well, I don't know," Chocolate replied, laughing, "but I'm sure there's ten of them. There's the father and mother, then the two old folks, four children and the two boarders. Isn't that ten?"

"Yes; but how do they manage to get along with such a family?" Stewart said.

"Well, now, I had a curiosity to know that," Chocolate said, demurely, "so I just got hold of the little boy one day, as he was going out with a big basket, and gave him a penny, and the honest little fellow told me that he was going out begging. He goes round to houses, gets cold victuals, which he brings home, and the mother cooks them up. He said he generally got his basket nearly full. And the father, he works on the streets, he is a laborer, and the mother takes in washing. She's a real hard-working woman. I met her on the stairs the other day, and she confided her troubles to me. The children are not very well, the two little ones; and one is such a pretty, blue-eyed baby. I go in sometimes when I hear it cry, and know that she's all alone, and take care of it for her; and she said that if Patrick—that's her husband—could only get some work in the country, where they could have a little house, with a pig and some chickens, she wouldn't ask for any thing more this side of the grave."

"Mary is quite interested in Mrs. Murphy," the sewing-girl said with a smile.

"It isn't her so much as that baby," replied Chocolate, quickly. "I like babies and they like me. There ain't one in the whole block that won't cry to come to aunty Chocolate when they see me."

"Chocolate!" said Weathers, in surprise; "what a strange name."

"But that isn't my name," replied the girl, with a wry face; "my name is Crofkin, and the little ones when they try to pronounce it, get it something like Chocolate, and a great stupid heard me mock one of them once and he commenced to call me Chocolate, and now it's a regular nickname for me; besides, I work in in a chocolate factory down in West Broadway, near where the Hudson river depot used to be."

"And where do you work?" asked Stewart, turning to Mary.

"At home, sir," she replied. "I take work from the shops, and sew on it here. I like it much better than going out."

"Mary isn't like me," Chocolate said, with a confident toss of her little head; "she don't get along out in the world as well as I do. Why, just think, she's afraid in the dark, and thinks she'll see hobgoblins, and all sorts of terrible things!"

"And you make shirts?" said Weathers, who had been looking at the basket of work. "Just what I want! Will you make me a dozen?"

CHAPTER VII.

HOW THE POOR LIVE.

STEWART looked at his friend in astonishment. He was perfectly well aware that Weathers had laid in a dozen new shirts only the week before.

The two girls, too, were astonished at the question.

"Oh, you needn't look, now, all of you!" Weathers exclaimed. "I'm in earnest and mean just what I say. I can't get a shirt to fit me high nor low. Now, miss, if you will undertake to make me a dozen shirts, I know that you'll be able to suit me, and I shall be eternally grateful."

"Why, of course you can make them, Mary!" Chocolate exclaimed. "I used to make all my father's shirts, and I can cut them out for you if you're afraid to try."

"I am in fear that I should not be able to please you," Mary said, timidly.

"Oh, I know you will!" Weathers declared, confidently, "and 'Lile here, too, wants some shirts to fit him. Ladies, if you had any idea what I have suffered, during the last month, in hearing him swear every time he put on a clean shirt—"

"Oh, come now! that's too much!" exclaimed Stewart, half offended, yet not able to keep from laughing at Weathers's serious manner.

"I don't really believe that," Mary said, coming to Stewart's rescue, and he thanked her by a grateful look.

"How much do you get, miss, for a dozen shirts, if it's not an impertinent question?" Weathers asked.

"Twenty-five cents apiece—three dollars for a dozen; that is for the making only," Mary explained.

The two friends exchanged looks.

"By Jinks! somebody must make money out of shirts then!" Weathers exclaimed. "I paid forty-eight dollars a dozen for these I've got on."

"Perhaps they are hand-made," Chocolate suggested; "let me see!" and she rose and approached Weathers.

"Oh, yes, they're hand-made," Weathers said. "I remember that they said I could have the machine-made shirts for three and three and a half apiece."

"Pull up your coat-sleeve and let me look," said Chocolate, in the abrupt, peremptory manner so natural to her.

Weathers obeyed immediately; he rather enjoyed being commanded by the lively young girl.

Chocolate's sharp eyes soon detected the truth.

"They're not hand-made!" she exclaimed, triumphantly. "It's machine-stitching. You've been swindled."

Weathers looked at her in a helpless sort of way.

"You see how they take advantage of my youth and innocence!" he cried. "Now, Miss Mary, you really must take this shirt contract."

"Oh, she'll do it!" cried Chocolate, quickly; "won't you, Mary?"

"I'm afraid that I shouldn't be able to please you," Mary said slowly, with a timid look into Stewart's grave face.

But that gentleman had understood Weathers's stratagem at last; he saw that it was his design, first, to assist the girl; second, to have an excuse to visit them. So, with a smile on his face, and a look of entreaty in his dark eyes, he joined in his friend's solicitations.

"I shall really feel much indebted, Miss Mary, if you will undertake this task for us," he said. "You see, both Nap and myself are two poor, friendless bachelors, without sisters or mothers, so that we are utterly at the mercy of the shirt-makers."

"No mother and no sisters!" exclaimed Chocolate. "Oh, you poor boy!" and she patted Weathers's head in sympathy.

The young man was delighted; the frankness of the girl pleased him.

The one look from Stewart's eyes was quite enough for Mary. Already, to please him had become the great desire of her life, and yet she knew it not.

"If you will promise not to be angry with me if I fail," she said, slowly.

"Oh, we'll hold you blameless!" Weathers cried, lightly, "and take all the responsibility. You must buy the cloth and every thing necessary, and make two dozen shirts, and we will pay you forty-eight dollars a dozen for them."

"You shan't do any such thing!" Chocolate exclaimed, in her usual quick, abrupt way. "It isn't worth any such price as that, unless she buys fancy bosoms at two dollars each, and I don't believe that you would like them."

"No, of course not!" said Stewart, quickly; he had a horror of any thing looking like display. "Plain bosoms will be quite good enough."

"But the best of cloth, of course," Weathers said.

"No, you don't want the best!" Chocolate exclaimed, decidedly, and then she thought of the way in which she had spoken, and her face colored up. "I didn't mean that!" she exclaimed, in confusion; "that is, I didn't mean to speak so rudely. I'm afraid you'll think I'm an awful girl," and she looked quite serious as she spoke.

"Oh, no, of course not," the two friends answered in chorus.

"I didn't mean to be rude, but I've got in the habit of speaking quick and saying just what I think. But what I mean is, that the dearest cloth doesn't always wear the best; it's too heavy, and cracks. Mary can make the shirts all by hand, and find all the materials, for two dollars and a half apiece, and then she'll make double what she can by her machine-work. Mary is a real nice sewer, too."

"Two dozen shirts, then, at thirty dollars, will be sixty dollars," Weathers remarked, as he took out his pocket-book. "How much money will you want for the materials?"

Chocolate made a little mental calculation.

"I guess that thirty dollars will be enough."

Weathers counted out the money into her hand.

"There," he added; "now understand: we give this enormous contract entirely into your hands, Miss Mary. You are to make the shirts after your own ideas. All we stipulate for is plain bosoms, to open behind, and large cuffs like these," and he exhibited one of his. "We'll bring you down the exact measure, next time we come."

Then Stewart's eyes were attracted by the little stand of plants by the window.

"You have quite a collection of flowers here," he said, rising and crossing over to them. Mary followed him, leaving Weathers and Chocolate alone by the table in the kitchen. "They are not in very good condition," he continued, bending over them, and noticing that the great part of them seemed to be either dead or dying.

"No; I don't know what is the matter with them," Mary replied, leaning listlessly against the side of the window. "I am very fond of flowers, and take good care of them, but they do not seem to thrive."

"A bird, too?" glancing at the canary.

"Yes; my Dick; and he sings very sweetly to me in the daytime while I am busy sewing."

"You seem to be quite happy in your little home here?"

"Yes; Chocolate and I are both orphans, and almost without friends."

And so the two talked on; he interested in the pretty, ladylike girl, with her sweet, sorrowful face, and she drinking in the dangerous incense of his praise, like one in a dream of bliss from which there could be no waking.

There was danger for both; they knew it, and yet could not resist the temptation.

And while Mary and Stewart were bending over the flowers, Weathers and Chocolate had got into busy conversation.

"How much rent do you have to pay here?" Weathers asked, in his inquisitive way.

"Ten dollars a month."

"That's about two dollars and a half a week; don't you find it pretty hard to get along sometimes?"

"No, not now," Chocolate replied, briskly; "I have a splendid place, and get eight dollars a week, and Mary makes about five dollars a week on her

sewing-machine. She expects to get some lace-collar work this spring, and if she does, she'll be able to earn from six to eight dollars."

"Do you ever go to any amusements?"

"Oh, yes; I go to a lecture at the Cooper Institute once in a while, Mary and I, with Peter;" then the girl stopped suddenly and her face flushed up.

Weathers felt a violent attack of jealousy seize upon him.

"Peter! Who's Peter, and what makes your face so red?"

"Why, Peter is the porter where I work; he lives down-stairs, and all the girls make fun of me about Peter, saying he's my beau, and they've got me so that I can hardly bear the sight of him; but there's another Peter that I love, though," and Chocolate made a dive behind the stove and produced a lanky, sleepy-looking gray-and-white cat. "This is the Peter that I like, and you ought to see us play on the floor sometimes. I know it isn't very ladylike, but it's real good fun. Do you know, I'm afraid to whip Peter, even when he's bad, for fear that he won't love me."

Then she held the cat up to her and caressed it with her cheek. Weathers envied the cat.

And so the evening passed away.

At ten o'clock, the two young men departed, agreeing to return in three nights with the measures for the shirts.

"Oh, I'm a fool!" Stewart muttered, as they descended into the street.

"How so?"

"I love this girl."

"Well, then, I'm another, for Chocolate has captured me!" Weathers rejoined, with droll seriousness.

CHAPTER VIII.

JOHN BLAINE AGAIN.

ERNESTINE recognized the face and form reflected in the large mirror in an instant. She had not forgotten John Blaine, though years had come and gone since she had looked upon him.

Blaine was dressed in a plain, dark suit, and stood in the center of the room, apparently listening, as if to ascertain whether there was any likelihood of anybody else entering the apartment.

His mind satisfied on that score, he turned his attention to the girl. A single glance he gave at the mirror, and in the pale face and horror-stricken eyes reflected there, he plainly read that his presence in the room was known.

"Ernestine," he said, in a low, cautious tone, as if afraid that the very walls might overhear and denounce him.

Slowly, like one under the fascination of some terrible spell, the girl wheeled around in her chair and faced him.

"You remember me?" he asked, as if half in doubt.

"John Blaine." Slowly and sadly the words came from the white lips.

"You have dismissed your maid for the night?" he questioned.

"Yes."

"Is there any probability of her returning?"

"No."

Painful was the effort to speak, and the voice of the fair young girl sounded hoarse and unnatural.

"Is there any one else in the house that is likely to come to night before you go to bed?"

"I—I think not."

A moment John Blaine looked at the white, horror-stricken face, and a touch of pity moved even his iron-like heart.

"Don't fear," he said, slowly; "there is no danger. Why, what are you staring at? Your face is as white as a sheet. Do I look like a ghost, or does the very sight of me chill the blood in your veins?"

"Yes," the girl answered, slowly.

He looked at her for a moment in a way that plainly showed that he was annoyed at the frank expression. Then, as a sudden thought seemed to come to him, he went with noiseless steps to the door and turned the key softly in the lock.

"There, now we are safe from interruption," he said, and he took a chair from its place by the wall, drew it to the center of the room and sat down, facing the girl.

She never moved; had it not been for the tremulous breath that swayed the soft, white bosom up and down, one might have imagined that it was a woman of wax who sat within the embrace of the arm-chair, so white were her features, so motionless her figure.

"I have been hiding in the closet waiting for you to come up," he said, as if in explanation. "I suppose that my appearance here to-night is something of a surprise to you?"

"No." The word came softly yet coldly from the white, wax-like lips. The girl's face, her voice and the quivering bosom all revealed how intense was the agony which she was enduring.

"Ernestine," and his voice, ever low and musical, now became doubly so, as he spoke with tender expression, "poor child, do not fear me." And he moved his chair nearer to the girl and took her soft, white palms in his. There was but little contrast between the jeweled fingers of the dainty woman and the taper, girl-like hands of the escaped convict.

His touch sent a cold shiver through her frame, and a long-drawn breath came from her lips.

"You are in an agony of fear," he said, slowly.

"Yes," she murmured.

"At my presence?"

"Yes," again the low, expressionless reply.

"Why should you fear me? Do you think that I come to do you harm?" he questioned, abruptly.

She shook her head.

"You are right; I love you too well to think of harming you," he said, quietly. "You say that my appearance here to-night did not surprise you, and yet it is nearly five years since we have met."

"I saw the newspaper which contained an account of your escape," she answered, slowly, and speaking only with great effort.

"And you naturally thought that I would pay you a visit, eh?"

"Yes."

"You were quite correct in your calculation, and now I suppose you can guess why I have come?"

Again the girl bowed her head in assent.

"It was a ticklish job to get at you," Blaine said, reflectively. "I did not want to come to the front

door and inquire for you, for I am not exactly dressed in the style required by fashionable society. I thought, too, that the chances were ten to one that I should not be able to gain admittance to you, and even if I had, for a shabbily-dressed fellow like myself to have called upon you, might have given rise to remarks, and just at the present time, I am not desirous of attracting any attention to myself. There are some inquisitive gentlemen in New York who would give a trifle to lay their eyes upon me just about this time. I have become a wolf now, and prefer the night to the day. By the way, hasn't it been a source of wonder to you as to what had become of me during all these years?"

"I thought that you were dead," she replied.

"Men of my stamp never die; they are like a cat, gifted with nine lives, and like that animal too, when they fall, they generally land upon their feet. No door ever yet closed upon me in this world, but that another one opened to receive me on the instant. As you will perceive, I had good reason for not ringing at your door, so I quietly watched my opportunity and sneaked in by the alley. I knew the house of old, though it is five years since I set foot in it, and I managed to get up-stairs to this room without being seen by a single soul. You were absent. I heard the sound of music coming from the parlor and naturally guessed that you were there; so I concealed myself in your closet and waited for you to come. Your maid came within an ace of discovering me once, too, which would have given rise to a very unpleasant affair; but, luckily, I had got behind the dresses at the further end of the closet, and so escaped her observation. Let me see," and he looked around him thoughtfully, "it was in this very room that I bid you good-by, wasn't it? How well I remember it. Ernestine, you were a beauty then, though hardly more than a child, but you were a woman in sense and intelligence. The few years that have passed have not changed you a great deal, my beauty." And, as he finished his speech, he leaned forward, took her cheeks between his palms, drew her head down to him and kissed the full, rich lips, that were wont to be so red and were now so white.

Submissive as a child, she yielded to his caress, and yet, had her will been consulted, the chilling embrace of the coiling serpent would have been far more welcome.

"You're a good girl," Blaine said, the fascinating, winning smile, that was so dangerous, upon his face, and then his hand toyed carelessly with the shining, golden locks that floated down over the girl's shoulders. "By the by, where were you about two years ago? Were you out of the city?"

"Two years?" and the girl reflected; "yes, in Europe. I returned about eighteen months ago."

"Ah, that accounts for it," Blaine said, thoughtfully. "I mean that that accounts for my not being able to reach you. Just about two years ago I was sent to Sing-Sing," then he noticed the slight shudder that quivered through the girl's frame, and guessed the cause. "Oh, I was innocent of the crime charged upon me," he cried, quickly. "But at that time, I was taken at a disadvantage. I had run out of money; you were away, and, in fact, I had no friend at hand who would aid me, so by false swearing and lack of funds on my part to fee skillful lawyers, I got five years in Sing-Sing. But, like Jack Sheppard, the prison's not yet built that can hold me. A friend came back; I had left a message for that friend who was faithful to the trust, and so, with gold, I cut a way through iron bars and a stone wall. And now I come to you for assistance."

"To me?"

"Yes; who else should I come to?" he asked, meaningly.

"True," and the fair head sunk down in despair.

"Oh, come, cheer up," he said, again caressing the golden hair; "a few hours at most and I will take the dark cloud of my presence from the sunlight of your life."

A deep sigh from the girl's lips was the only answer.

"And now I'll tell you what I want. The detectives are on my track; the man that escaped with me has been recaptured and blabbed all he knew in regard to my disguise and purposes. I have come into this house, John Blaine; I must go out as somebody else. The bloodhounds are close upon me, and I must double on them or I am lost. This house as an asylum is one point gained: they will never think of looking for me here. Escaped convicts do not usually select Madison avenue palaces as hiding-places. I must remain here with you to-night, and to-morrow you must find me some place where I can remain concealed for a few days until the present hot chase is over and the scent is cold. In the mean time you can go out and procure me a disguise; then I want a thousand dollars or so to take me out of the country. It will be a very cheap way of getting rid of me, my dear. Don't trouble yourself about my accommodation here to-night. Just give me one of the pillows from the bed, and I will camp down here on the sofa; it will be far more comfortable than my convict's bunk at Sing-Sing. You can watch over me while I sleep, and, mind, if I am discovered, it's Sing-Sing and hard labor for three years."

Blaine rose from his seat, took a pillow from the bed and adjusted it upon the lounge, then extended himself upon it. The girl never stirred from her place, but remained motionless as a statue.

"Now, go into your dressing-room, put on a wrapper, then lie down on your bed. Your face in the morning must not betray that you have passed a sleepless night."

The girl obeyed without a word.

When she came from the dressing-room, the costly silk changed for a loose dress, again he spoke.

"Come and kiss me good-night, then turn down the gas, and go to sleep if you can."

Twenty minutes later John Blaine slept as calmly as a child, while Ernestine, with an aching heart, prayed for the morning to come.

CHAPTER IX.

THE VIRGINIA COLONEL.

"Young man, I'll trouble you for that leetle package I left with you for safe keeping," said a medium-sized man, dressed rather meanly, speaking to one of the clerks in the office of the St. Nicholas Hotel.

This was on the evening after the one on which

Blackie had been received as a guest in the Van Tromp mansion.

"Yes, sir," said the clerk, casting a rapid glance at the speaker, and unable to remember of ever seeing him before. "What name, sir?"

"Colonel Richard Campbell, Competition, Virginia; I had room 440."

"You must be mistaken, sir," said the hotel clerk, suspiciously. "I remember the gentleman that I gave 440 to last night, and I am sure that you are not the party."

"I didn't say that I had it last night," the Virginia colonel said, tartly.

"If you will oblige me by stating what you did say, sir?" observed the clerk, with elaborate politeness; he didn't relish the tone or manner of the stranger.

"I said that my name was Colonel Richard Campbell, of Competition, Virginia, and that I had room 440, young man," the Virginian said, slowly and distinctly; and as he spoke, he looked the clerk in the eye in a manner which was not at all agreeable to that gentleman, who had been used to bullying unfortunate travelers pretty much as he pleased, and he especially disliked being addressed by such a familiar term as "young man."

But there was a certain something in the eye of the colonel which said "fight" quite distinctly, so the clerk contented himself with a scornful glance, and commenced to examine the hotel register.

He ran his eyes rapidly over the page devoted to the preceding day, then the next one, and so on for about five days, but no Colonel Richard Campbell could he find. He instantly set the defiant stranger down in his own mind as being one of that peculiar class common to the metropolis, and not unknown in other large cities of our land, usually termed a "fraud."

"See here, I can't find your name on the register," he said, and he eyed the stranger as insolently as he dared; for, though the colonel was far from being a big man, yet the brawny shoulders and well-built form told of strength and power.

"So I perceive," the colonel said, not in the least ruffled. "How far back have you looked?"

"I have looked at all the arrivals for five days, sir."

"Further back yet, young man; 'go for it.'"

Neither the colonel's tone, the offensive "young man" appellation, nor the slang phrase, added to the good temper of the clerk, but he obeyed the injunction, and consulted the register again.

He went back a week, then to the first of the month, and then gave it up in despair.

"I can't find it here, sir!" he exclaimed sharply.

"So I perceive," said the colonel, thoughtfully. "How far back does that register go?"

"First of January, 'seventy-three."

"Yes, I was here before that time," the stranger said, apparently deep in reflection.

The clerk got out the register for the past year.

"Now if you will oblige me with the exact month and day, sir?" the clerk said.

"The second of December," replied the stranger. And still the search was fruitless.

"You must have made some mistake, sir; I can't find your name," the clerk said, very much annoyed; "besides, I don't remember you at all."

"You wasn't the man who gave me the room."

"Ah! I thought not," and the clerk plainly implied by his manner his doubts as to whether the stranger had ever had a room in the hotel at all.

"How long have you been here?" asked the colonel, suddenly.

"Eighteen months, sir," replied the clerk, shortly.

"Ah! it was before your time."

"What!" and the clerk looked at the quiet stranger in utter astonishment.

"I was here December second, eighteen-seventy-one," said the colonel.

The clerk relieved his mind by swearing quietly to himself for a moment, then he again addressed the applicant:

"You want a package that you left here two years ago?"

"Yes."

"Why didn't you say so at first, and not put me to all this trouble?" he demanded, indignantly.

"What are you paid for, sonny?" asked the stranger, coolly.

And there was great probability that something more than words would have passed between the two had not the approach of one of the proprietors just at that time prevented it.

The clerk cooled his wrath, and turning to the landlord, made known to him the request of the stranger.

"Ah, yes, I think I remember something about a package being left here and never called for," the landlord said, thoughtfully. "Of course it will be necessary for you to give full particulars regarding it, as after this lapse of time it will be clearly impossible for any one to identify you," he said to the stranger.

"The package is a large yellow envelope, directed to Colonel Richard Campbell, Competition, Virginia. It's sealed with red wax, and the seal has got this stamp on it," and the stranger held up his little finger, on which was a seal-ring that on its surface bore the semblance of a bear's paw. Then he took up a pen and a card, and wrote the same inscription upon it which he had declared the envelope bore. "The package was directed by me," he said. "You can compare the handwritings, and see if they agree."

"Yes, sir." Then the landlord directed the clerk as to the particular part of the safe where the package had been placed.

"Quite a long time to leave a package uncalled for," he observed, "particularly if it contains articles of value."

"Circumstances prevented me from calling before," the colonel replied; "but, landlord, you ought to remember me. Don't you remember that bear-story? How I got hold of the tail in the cave, and was afraid to let go for fear she'd turn round and claw me, and then had a rough-and-tumble fight with her in the dark?"

"Yes; it appears to me I do remember; down somewhere in Virginia, wasn't it?" the landlord said, thoughtfully.

"Yes; on the old Blue Ridge range, headwaters of the Staunton river."

"Ah, yes; I do remember."

Then the clerk came back with the package. The description was exact.

"Thank you, much obliged," the colonel said, as he put the package away carefully in an inner pocket.

"Oh, you're welcome, sir. Is the package of value?" the landlord asked; his curiosity was excited.

"Well, yes; about five thousand dollars," the colonel replied, carelessly.

Both the landlord and the clerk stared.

"Why, it seems to me that it was rather risky, leaving a package of such value for so long a time," the landlord said, in astonishment.

"Yes; I couldn't very well come for it before; I was detained," the colonel replied, preparing to depart.

"Ah! by business, I suppose?"

"No; by the authorities in charge of the Lunatic Asylum on Blackwell's Island."

Then the stranger bowed himself out gracefully, leaving both landlord and clerk considerably astonished.

Colonel Richard Campbell, as the cool stranger had called himself, then took his way up the street.

Broadway was still quite full of people, for it was early in the evening and the stores were only just beginning to close.

The colonel walked slowly on, evidently in deep meditation. Ever and anon he muttered to himself. Then suddenly his thoughts framed themselves into clearly-spoken words.

"He must be in the city!" he exclaimed, half-fiercely. "Where else should he find shelter? The police are owls; they can capture the common villain, but this man is too much for them. They say that they are on the track and that they expect to effect his arrest at any moment, but they lie! they can't do it!"

Then the speaker raised his eyes, which had been bent upon the ground, and looked around him. It was a motion without a purpose, and yet it produced strange results. His eyes fell upon a face framed in the window of an omnibus rolling slowly up town.

For a moment the Virginian stood transfixed, then gave vent to his surprise in words.

"By all the devils below, there he is now!" he cried, and the hot thrill of joy passed through his frame until every muscle swelled.

"I'm for you!" he exclaimed, apparently totally unconscious that he stood in the crowded street, and he shook his fist at the retreating omnibus. "I'll track you now until I give you back again to the prison dress and the cold stone walls!"

And up the street in chase of the stage he went.

No wonder that the colonel was excited, for in the omnibus, dressed like a woman, he had recognized the escaped convict, John Blaine.

CHAPTER X.

A BLOODHOUND.

CAPTAIN KELSO, Superintendent of the Police of New York City, was seated in his private office in the Police Headquarters on Mulberry street.

It was about nine o'clock in the evening, and the captain, stroking his brown beard thoughtfully, and lazily enjoying a fragrant cigar, was deep in meditation. No sinecure was the office of Superintendent of the New York police.

The meditations of the worthy officer were disturbed by the entrance of a subordinate.

"Well, what is it?" asked the captain, looking up.

"A man wants to see you, sir."

"To see me in person?"

"Yes; he refuses to state his business, but says that it is of the utmost importance and he must see you."

"Run him in," was the terse response.

The burly superintendent generally had a pretty good idea of what such applicants as the one at present wanted before he saw them. Usually it was a case of pocket-picking or some such minor crime, which the party aggrieved imagined could be at once made right and the offender punished, if they could only succeed in gaining speech with the head of the "force," instead of making their complaint to the proper officers detailed to receive it.

The captain had discovered that the easiest way to get rid of them was to receive them and then turn them over to the regular clerks.

In a few moments the subordinate returned, ushering in the Virginian, Colonel Campbell.

"Captain Kelso?" questioned the colonel.

"Yes, sir."

"I should like to speak with you in private, if you will have the kindness to permit me to do so," said the Virginian, in his prompt, decisive way. "My business is important. I think that I can give you some information which will lead to the capture of an escaped convict."

Kelso was all attention in an instant. He perceived at the first glance that his visitor meant business. So, pushing a chair to him, he begged him to be seated, and at the same time nodded to the attendant to leave them alone.

The moment the door closed behind the "metropolitan," Campbell proceeded at once to explain.

"A man called John Blaine escaped from Sing-Sing a few days ago?"

"Yes, sentenced for five years for assault; had three more years to serve," Kelso added, concisely.

"And he has so far succeeded in eluding all search for him."

The superintendent stroked his beard and nodded assent. "The detectives are on the scent, sir. I am in expectation of receiving the news of his arrest at any moment," he declared, confidently.

The Virginian looked at the superintendent for a moment, and then a quiet smile came over his face.

"Captain, that is about what you say in regard to all criminals, isn't it?" he queried.

The question rather posed the captain. No man in New York knew better than he how many criminals escaped arrest, and how many crimes were committed, the perpetrators of which entirely escaped detection.

"Oh, no, sir," he responded, promptly. "I assure you the officers are hot on his track; he cannot possibly get out of the city, sir, and, as I said before, I expect to hear of his being brought in every moment."

"Ah! then, if your officers are so well informed, the information that I possess in regard to the

whereabouts of John Blaine is of no use," and the stranger rose, as if to withdraw.

"Hold on, my dear sir; don't be in a hurry!" exclaimed the captain, who really didn't feel half so sure about the capture of the fugitive as he pretended. "If you have any knowledge of the hiding-place of this fellow, I should be very glad to receive it, and, if it should prove valuable, I've no doubt that the officers who are now working the case would willingly allow you a fair share of the reward offered for this man's recapture."

"They can keep the reward; I don't want any money," replied the colonel, quickly. "If you will put me in communication with the proper officers, I will show them John Blaine inside of an hour."

This bold proposition rather astonished the captain. For to tell the truth, though the detectives had been close upon the convict at one time, by some dexterous twist he had succeeded in entirely throwing them off the track, and, though they felt sure that he was still in the city, they had not the remotest idea where he had managed to conceal himself.

The captain looked for a moment at the stranger in a thoughtful manner. Then an idea struck him; he opened a drawer in the desk, took out half a dozen photographs, and spread them out on the desk.

"Is John Blaine's picture here?" he demanded, pointing to the portraits.

Without a moment's hesitation the Virginian picked out John Blaine's picture from among the rest, and held up the smooth, womanly face for the captain's inspection.

This entirely removed the captain's doubts.

"Can you make the arrest immediately?" he asked.

"Immediately."

"Two men will be enough." Then the superintendent touched the bell, and an officer entered the room in obedience to the summons.

"Has Lane or Irving come in?" the captain demanded.

"Both in, sir."

"That's lucky!" he exclaimed; "the two detectives who are working the case up," he explained, turning to the colonel. "Send them in," and the officer retired.

In a moment the two detectives, who were dressed in plain black, entered the room.

Kelso briefly explained to the two the offer of the Virginian, much to their astonishment, for they had returned to head-quarters "clean beat," as one of them had defined the situation.

"Perhaps he may change his quarters before we can get at him?" one of the detectives suggested.

"It's not likely," Campbell replied; "the disguise he has assumed is perfect; besides, I've left a spy upon him. He's stopping at the Hoffman House."

A low whistle of astonishment came from Lane, and, in fact, all three of the police officers looked at each other in wonder.

"He's playing a bold game," Kelso said, abruptly, "but you had better 'go for him' at once. Don't give him a chance to try another double."

The two detectives and the colonel retired immediately, leaving the captain of police to his meditations.

The three jumped into a stage and rode up town to the hotel; then they alighted and held a consultation on the sidewalk.

"I know the room; I bribed one of the servants to watch it for me and to follow the party if he went out," the colonel explained.

"We had better walk right up to the room and go in," Irving suggested. "He won't be apt to make much of a fight with three of us against him."

The three proceeded into the hotel and up-stairs. Going quietly along, and being in citizen's dress, they attracted no attention.

On the landing of the third floor they halted. A servant was lounging in the entry. He approached when he saw the colonel.

"All right?" asked the Virginian, drawing a two-dollar bill from his wallet.

"Yes, sar."

"Not gone out?"

"No, sar."

The colonel then transferred the bill to the hands of the servant, who at once departed.

"You know the party?" the colonel asked, turning to the detectives.

"I do," answered Lane. "I happen to be the very man who arrested him, about two years ago."

"That is lucky," Campbell said, thoughtfully.

"His disguise is perfect; he is dressed up as a woman."

"A woman!" cried the detectives, in a breath, in utter astonishment.

"Yes; and he looks exactly like one, too; but I remember his face too well to ever forget it. I recognized it to-night as he was riding up Broadway in a stage. I knew him the moment I saw him; I followed him to this hotel, then to this room, and I engaged the darkey to keep an eye upon the room and see if he went out, while I was off to the police station."

"Well, he does look something like a woman," said Lane, thoughtfully; "his face is very fair, and if I remember right, he hasn't any beard at all."

"No, none. Why, not one man out of a thousand would have any suspicion that he wasn't a woman," the colonel said.

"We had better open the door and go right in without knocking," Irving suggested, and the others assented.

And then the three stood by the door, Lane's hand on the knob.

CHAPTER XI.

LOVE AND PRIDE.

THE evening at last arrived on which the two friends were to visit the girls in their sky-parlor, on Fourteenth street.

And both the cool, reserved Stewart, and the lively, impetuous Weathers had counted the days which had intervened, so anxious were they for the appointed time to come.

After supper the two had gone up-stairs to their room.

"Stewart, do you know I'd like to offer this little girl some present, if I thought she would accept it?" Weathers said, suddenly.

"That depends altogether upon what the present is," Stewart rejoined.

"By Jinks! I do think a deal of her. The way in

which she seems to take possession of me, as if I were some great baby, tickles me. She is so awful afraid, too, of giving offense. She's a deuced smart little girl, and I really believe that I like her better than any girl I have ever seen. What I like about her is that she don't seem to lay herself out to catch a fellow as they do in our circle of acquaintances up-town. And I say, Stewart, I think that you are pretty well tangled up by the pretty eyes of the other Mary, too."

"Did I not say that I was in love with the girl?" asked Stewart, throwing himself down in a rocking-chair, and looking like any thing but a happy lover.

"Well, you needn't get so deuced tragic about it!" Weathers exclaimed. "You're a funny fellow."

"Am I?" asked Stewart, sarcastically.

"You know what I mean, well enough!" Weathers retorted. "Now, I'm over head and ears in love, and I'm happy; you're as deep in the mud as I am in the mire, and you are miserable. Perhaps you think that the girl doesn't care for you?"

"I know that she does," was the decided reply.

"There, now, you see what an advantage you have over me. I am not at all sure about Chocolate. She doesn't show any particular signs to lead me to suppose that she cares two pins about me, except that she appears to try to make me comfortable when I go to see her, and to be as agreeable as possible. But, I say, how do you know that the other cares for you?" asked Weathers, inquisitive, as usual.

"By the way she acts," Stewart replied. "She says but very little, seemingly content to let me do the talking, and happy herself in listening to me. And then when we bent over to look at the flowers, I placed my arm about her waist, and she did not attempt to remove it; and our heads, too, came so close together, that our hair touched, and again she did not shrink from the contact. She is of a modest, retiring nature, and had she not cared for me she would not have permitted any such familiarity."

"What a cool, cold-blooded animal you are!" exclaimed Weathers, in astonishment.

"How so?" demanded Stewart, wondering at the outburst.

"Why, to remember all these little things. People think that we Yankees are a calculating race, but you Scotchmen can beat us. Why, if I had put my arm around that little sharp-eyed girl, and felt her breath on my cheek, I should have had to have hugged her on the spot. I couldn't have resisted the temptation."

"You have not attempted to make love to the girl, then, and yet you feel a decided affection for her?" Stewart queried. "In fact, I believe it is the first time that I have ever seen you impressed by the charms of any girl."

"By Jinks! you're right!" exclaimed Weathers, decidedly. "And do you know why I have taken a fancy to her?"

"Because she is lively and cheerful, I suppose."

"Oh, of course I like her for that; she's splendid company; but the main thing is because she has not tried to make me like her."

"Who said that we sometimes gain a point by apparently going away from it?" asked Stewart, abruptly.

"Now, come, I don't like that!" Weathers exclaimed, just a little vexed. "That's just like you. Don't you believe that there's any truth or goodness in the world?"

"Sometimes I have grave doubts."

"Then you had better go and help to fill up some graveyard right away!" Weathers declared, indignantly. "If I have got to go through life with the idea that every man I meet is a rogue, and every woman is false, I want to sell out right away."

Stewart got up, paced up and down the room for a few moments, and then turned suddenly to his friend:

"Nap, old boy, you are right!" he exclaimed; "there is both truth and love in this world if a man will search for them. Ever since I have met this girl I have been fighting to keep down the love for her which I felt was growing up in my heart, and the struggle has made me wretched."

"What the deuce did you want to do it for?" demanded Weathers, in astonishment.

"Because she is only a poor girl, and the foolish pride which is so large a part of my nature, cries out that I should look higher in the social scale for a wife."

"Oh, 'social scale' be hanged!" vociferated Weathers, irreverently. "When I see men who have made their money by stealing railroads and swindling the Government by false swearing, and in a half a dozen other tricky operations, constituting themselves the leaders of our upper-tendom, I come to the deliberate conclusion that our so-called best society is a confounded humbug. I don't want any of it. Give me a quiet, well-ordered home, a little box down by the salt water for the summer, a loving little wife, three or four babies, and I'll say quits with the world."

"You're right!" Stewart spoke thoughtfully. "The struggle is over, now. I love the girl, and I'll marry her."

"So will I the other—if she'll have me, I mean, which is doubtful."

"Come, let us be going; I want to stop at one of the flower-stores as we go down."

"A bouquet, eh?"

"No, some plants. Mary is very fond of flowers, and those she has already do not seem to thrive; so as I came up town I ordered some few hardy plants, which I think she will be able to keep alive."

"You have got a head, haven't you?" exclaimed Weathers, in admiration.

Stewart smiled at the compliment.

"I bought a little book, too, which gives full particulars how to take care of flowers in the house in winter. I think that Mary will prize that."

"See here!" exclaimed Weathers, suddenly. "I must carry my Chocolate something. It will never do for me to stand quietly by and see you lay your offerings on the shrine, and I empty-handed. What shall I buy her—something touching and elegant—something designed to express my burning passion and her wonderful goodness?"

"I really can't advise you," Stewart replied, laughing at the comic expression upon Weathers's fat face.

"Oh, but say something; you're one of the clever fellows who understand such little delicate flattery," Weathers pleaded,

"Well, buy her something that will please her. What is she fond of?"

"All that I can think of at present is the cat," replied Weathers, thoughtfully; "I remember that she said she couldn't consider any household comfortable without a well-regulated cat. She didn't say it in those words exactly, but that's the idea. It won't do to take her another cat, you know, because the two would fight. Oh, 'Life! if I didn't envy that gray and white beast the other night when she had it in her arms!' Weathers exclaimed, pathetically.

"Come, we shall be late," Stewart urged; "you can think of something as we go along."

"All right."

Then the two donned their overcoats and hats and descended to the street.

"We'll walk down to the flower-store and then take a car from there," Stewart remarked, as they crossed over Broadway.

"Yes, and while you're in the store I'll get my present. I've thought of something which she wished she had the other night," Weathers added, triumphantly. "Wait for me if you get through before I get back."

Stewart assented, and when they reached the florist's, he went in, while Weathers hurried down the street and entered a jewelry store.

The plants were not quite ready, and by the time they were packed carefully in a box, Weathers was back.

The two took a car down as far as Fourteenth street, and there got out and proceeded up the street.

"By the way, what did you buy?" asked Stewart, who noticed that Weathers did not have any parcel in his hand.

"Ah, that's telling," replied his friend. "I've bought two articles; the first one, I think, she will refuse, but the second, I'll bet she will accept."

"Let me know what the two articles are and perhaps I'll bet with you," Stewart insinuated.

"No you don't!" exclaimed Weathers; "I'm not going to tell. But you have got the shirt-measures all right?"

"Yes, in my pocket-book."

'Twas only a short distance, and soon the two friends were ascending the dimly-lighted stairs of the tenement-house.

CHAPTER XII. A CONFESSION.

THE two girls were in waiting, and hardly had Weathers tapped on the glass pane, when Chocolate opened the door, her bright face as smiling as ever.

Mary was sitting in the inner room, sewing as usual. She did not advance to receive Stewart, only rose and waited for him to come to her, but the look upon her delicate, spiritual face and the joyous light shining from the great, gray-blue eyes, fully revealed how much she was delighted at his coming.

He advanced at once to her, leaving Weathers with Chocolate in the inner room.

As Stewart passed into the little sitting-room, one of the half-doors swung to, so that the two were hid from the view of the others in the kitchen.

Stewart extended his hand eagerly; with a half-blush and a drooping of the gaze of the dark eyes to the ground, she yielded her little hand to his warm pressure. The features of the girl now suffused with blushes; the love was in her face; she did not—could not conceal it. The strong arm of Stewart glided gently around the slender waist, then he drew the lithe, supple form to him until she rested on his breast, supine, raved with joy! The little shapely head, crowned with the dark-brown locks of silken hair, rested softly on his bosom. A moment he gazed with a look full of passionate love down upon the almost perfect face, so lovely in its fair, young beauty, and then he slowly bent his head, and with one—two—three short, sweet kisses on the soft, red lips, he told the girl that she was loved.

Little need for words when the lips can preach, and the heart translate.

And while Stewart and Mary were happy in the first transports of their young love, Weathers and Chocolate in the outer room were not getting along so well.

Weathers had shaken the girl warmly by the hand, and noticing, like his friend, that the door had swung to, had improved the opportunity to pass his arm around the little waist of Chocolate and draw her up to him, a proceeding that she submitted to with a good grace, but, as he bent his head and imprinted a kiss upon her plump little mouth, she instantly came to the conclusion that he was going altogether too far, and, in a second, she freed herself from his arms and dealt him such a spiteful box on the ear that it fairly made his head swim.

And then, a little way from him, Chocolate shook her head and scolded him in dumb show, afraid to make a noise lest she should alarm the two in the other room, while Weathers rubbed his ear and looked extremely sheepish.

"I shall be real angry if you ever dare to do such a thing again," Chocolate said, in a whisper, and she threatened him with her little clenched fist.

"By jinks! I wouldn't have done it now if I had known that you were going to get so mad and hit a fellow so," Weathers rejoined, ruefully.

"Oh, I'm real sorry if I hurt you," Chocolate protested, changing in her manner in an instant, and coming up to him; then she patted his cheek softly.

"It didn't hurt!" replied Weathers, manfully, but, to tell the truth, his ear had not got over stinging yet.

"I know that I must have hurt you, and I'm sorry," she said, evidently repenting her act. "But, it always makes me so angry when any one tries to kiss me."

"But don't your beau try to kiss you?" he asked.

"I never had a beau."

"What, no lover?" he exclaimed, in astonishment.

"No, I don't wish any either. I don't believe in love. I'm going to be an old maid," she said, seriously.

"Oh, nonsense!" he cried; "and do you mean to tell me that you have never given up your lips to a lover's kiss in all your life?"

"Never!" she replied.

"What a rare treasure you are then!" he exclaimed, in wonder, and in his delight he came near embracing her again, but she retreated and held up her finger in warning.

"Now sit down and be good," she said.

He obeyed, and the two sat down by the table.

"Do you like to look at pretty things?" he asked.

"I'm a woman, ain't I?" she said, laughing.

"You mean that you will be one of these days," he answered. "But see, what do you think of this?" and he took a jewel-case from his pocket and opened it as he spoke.

Within the case was a beautiful little gold watch and chain.

A cry of delight came from the girl's lips as she looked upon the glittering bauble.

"Oh! isn't that pretty!" she cried, in rapture. "Who is it for?"

"For you if you like," responded Weathers, carelessly, but his heart was thumping away against his ribs and his face was as red as fire.

The girl made a wry face, but as she was busy examining the watch and chain, she did not notice the agitation that was so plainly visible in his face.

"It's not for me, I know," she replied, "because you haven't the right to give me anything as costly as this, and I should be very sorry if you thought, even for a moment, that I would accept an expensive present like this from you." Chocolate spoke quite seriously for her.

"Yes, of course; I know that; I only borrowed it to show it to you. I shall carry it back again in the morning," and Weathers spoke truthfully here, for he had made such an arrangement with the jeweler. "But now, here's something that I really did bring for you," he said, and he closed up the jewel-case and put it back in his pocket; then from the pocket of his vest he drew a little open-faced silver watch, about the size of a half-dollar, one of the peculiar little German time-pieces such as are sometimes brought over by emigrants from the Fatherland.

"Oh!" exclaimed Chocolate, delighted, "isn't that cunning?"

"Yes, now I bought that for you expressly. You were saying the other night that you wished you could afford to buy a watch, and I saw this in the window, and thought of you. Now, won't you please accept this—it didn't cost much?" Weathers said, humbly.

Chocolate looked at the little watch for a moment with her sharp eyes. It was a great temptation.

"I'm going to do a real rude thing," she said, at last. "I'm going to ask you how much it cost?" and she laid her little hand on Weathers's arm, and looked up in his face with that coquettish, persuasive, womanly grace which has always had such a dangerous effect upon soft-hearted man since the days of old Father Adam.

"It didn't cost much," he replied, and so moved was he by her cunning glance that he had an insane desire that she would request him to jump out of the window, or do something else desperate to prove his love.

"But how much? Please tell me!" she pleaded.

"Five dollars; I got it for just what the jeweler gave. In fact, he said it was about the same as making me a present of it. I buy all my stuff there. He said the works were good, and worth ten dollars alone."

"Five dollars isn't a very great deal, is it?" Chocolate said, reflectively. She was arguing with her conscience.

"No!" exclaimed Weathers, eagerly, "and I'll tell you what, if you feel any scruples about accepting it, you can pay me for it in some way; make me some neckties, or something of that sort."

"Yes, that will do!" cried the girl, quite joyfully; she wanted to accept the watch, but wished to feel free in doing so. "I'll make you five nice neckties."

And so the matter was settled. Weathers felt quite joyful and quite proud, and there was a softer look, too, in Chocolate's sharp eyes. The girl really liked him, and far better, too, than she had ever liked any one else.

And while the two in the kitchen were settling this important matter, the two in the inner room had had quite an important conversation.

Stewart and Mary had sat down on the little sofa, side by side.

Like a bird seeking shelter in the nest attached to the pendent bough, Mary's little hand had drooped down upon the shoulder of her lover.

And there, motionless, it rested while he, in fond, impassioned tones, strangely warm for one of Stewart's icy nature, told her how fondly she was loved, and how dear she had become to him.

The girl replied not, but, motionless, like one in a dream, with close-shut eyes she listened to the honeyed words which conveyed so blissful a meaning.

Stewart would have believed that the girl had fainted, had not the quick breath and the heaving bosom told of the happiness which his words had given.

And then came the question, the sweet one which the loving maiden craves so to hear.

"Darling, I love you better than all the world beside; will you be my wife?"

And then the flushed face was pressed still closer to him, a sob shook the fragile frame, and with a moan like unto a lost soul drifting to eternal fires, she sobbed:

"I can not—there is a stain upon me—I am not worthy to be your wife."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE ARREST.

SOFTLY and noiselessly the detective turned the knob and swung the door open. Then the three saw that at the further end of the room, seated in an arm-chair, with the back to the door, was a female form.

"There he is!" said Campbell, in a whisper, pointing to the person attired like a woman in the arm-chair.

Then, with rapid steps, the three advanced and surrounded their prey.

"You're my prisoner, John Blaine!" cried Irving, placing his hand upon the shoulder covered with silk.

With a cry of horror, the occupant of the arm-chair rose in great alarm, and, turning, faced the three.

If the arrest had been a surprise, the white face that now confronted the officers was a still greater surprise to them.

It was the face of John Blaine, the escaped convict, and yet it was the face of a woman.

With wondering eyes the three bloodhounds looked

upon the pale, handsome face of the girl, which now wore a look of horror.

Little wonder that Campbell, catching but a hasty glance at the face as it went by him, framed in the window of the omnibus, had imagined that it was the face of John Blaine. The resemblance was, indeed, wonderful.

The three were so thoroughly astonished that they could only gaze like three idiots at the beautiful girl.

They had, indeed, made a terrible mistake.

Their prisoner, John Blaine, was a young and handsome woman, magnificently dressed, and wearing diamonds worth a king's ransom.

A full minute the actors in this strange scene gazed at each other, the three men in speechless astonishment, and the woman with a look of alarm upon her features. But she was the first to recover her presence of mind. She had detected in the faces of the three men, who had entered her room so unceremoniously, that they had made some terrible blunder, and she was quick to improve the advantage.

"What do you wish, gentlemen?" she questioned, haughtily.

The question recalled the three to their senses.

"Durn my cats!" muttered Campbell, in astonishment, "if it ain't wonderful!"

"I really beg your pardon, miss," said Lane; "but we are detective officers in search of an escaped convict, one John Blaine."

"And do you imagine that he is concealed in my apartments?" questioned the girl, haughtily, and without giving the detective time to finish his speech. "If so, you are at perfect liberty to search for him." And then the girl opened the door leading to the other apartment. "This is my bed-chamber, gentlemen. Search thoroughly. I have no objections to offer, although I confess I am at a loss to understand why you should imagine that an escaped convict could find concealment here."

"I really beg your pardon, miss," said Lane, slowly, and with deference expressed both in his voice and manner. "It's all a mistake. We are now perfectly aware that there is no one concealed in these apartments. It is a case of mistaken identity. Of course you cannot be aware of the fact, but your face bears a most wonderful resemblance to the face of the man that we are in search of."

A peculiar expression passed across the face of the girl; 'twas as fleeting as the flash of the summer lightning, but it did not escape the eyes of Campbell.

"I suppose, gentlemen, that you are now satisfied that I am not the person you are in search of?" she said, smiling.

"Oh, yes, miss," replied Lane, quickly, "and, trusting that you will excuse the mistake and pardon the intrusion, we will depart."

The girl bowed graciously, and the three withdrew.

In the hall, and the door closed behind them, the three held a brief consultation together.

"Well, now, this beats my time!" exclaimed Lane, in astonishment. "You don't know this fellow, Jim, and, of course, it don't strike you, but I never saw such a likeness in all my life. Why, this girl is the perfect image of John Blaine. Same kind of eyes, hair, and just about the same size. I don't wonder at your being taken in by the likeness," and he turned to Campbell.

That gentleman was deep in thought, and, on being addressed, raised his eyes and looked vacantly at the detective, but did not speak.

"The jig is up, anyway, and we might as well get back to head-quarters," Irving remarked.

"Good-night," said Campbell, abruptly, and he walked off down the entry, apparently in a state of abstraction.

The two detectives looked after him for a moment in wonder.

"A queer customer," remarked Irving.

"Seems a little cracked in the upper story," replied Lane, as they departed.

Campbell walked down the entry a little way; then he suddenly paused, and, pressing both hands on his temples, leaned up against the side of the passageway, and groaned aloud, in agony.

"Oh, Heaven!" he muttered, "am I going mad again? This woman's face is John Blaine's, and yet she is not John Blaine. I am not crazy, for these men noticed the resemblance. She knows something of John Blaine; I know it! I am sure of it. I saw the expression that passed over her face. I must find out all about her. I may be mad, but I have an idea that if I watch her she will bring me to him."

Campbell at once appeared to recover his calmness; he went quietly down-stairs, and passed through the office into the street.

The Hoffman House saw him no more that night, but about nine o'clock on the following morning, attired in a fashionable gray suit and carrying a small carpet-bag in his hand, he entered the hotel, registered his name as Colonel Richard Campbell, of Competition, Virginia, and arranged for a week's board.

The colonel lounged in and about the office a great deal during the day, and, being apparently of a frank and genial nature, he soon got upon very friendly terms with the clerks of the hotel. One in particular he became quite intimate with; so much so, that he and the clerk visited one of the theaters that evening in company, and then afterward had oysters and champagne, all of which the colonel insisted upon settling for, with true old Virginian hospitality.

Of course it is hardly necessary to state that the clerk became speedily convinced that the colonel was a high-toned gentleman.

And after they had returned to the hotel, and sat in the office, smoking—at the colonel's expense, of course—quietly and carelessly, the Virginian led the conversation to a beautiful girl whom he had noticed passing through the hotel entry.

"Let me see," said the clerk, thoughtfully; "black hair and eyes you say?"

"Black hair but gray eyes, I think," the colonel replied. "A tall, queenly looking girl, very fair complexion, not much color in her cheeks."

"Oh, yes!" exclaimed the clerk. "I know who you mean now. She is a beautiful girl, though, to my fancy, her face is just a little masculine."

"Yes, it is a little," the colonel assented. "Who is she?"

"She's a Miss Rosaline Ameston. She's been stopping with us now about a year."
 "I notice that she wears magnificent diamonds."
 "Yes, I believe that she is very wealthy. She is all alone in the world, too."

"Yes?"
 "She's a Tennessee girl; of French descent, I believe. She's very much of a lady, and about the finest piano-player that I think I ever heard. Of course I'm not speaking of the professional artists!"

"Yes; I suppose that she has plenty of suitors?" the colonel said, carelessly.

"Well, no, she hasn't. She is a very particular girl; a great favorite with the ladies of the house. There's only one gentleman that I know of that's

out sleighing with him twice, and yet he's only known her a short time."

"She doesn't have many visitors, then?"

"No; she's quite reserved and select."

Then, after a few minutes more of careless conversation upon various subjects the colonel said "Good-night!" and retired to rest.

The information he had gained was far from being satisfactory, though.

"What is she to John Blaine?" he muttered, as he paced up and down his room, for, strange to say, the thought that in some mysterious way the beautiful girl was connected with the escaped convict's fortunes was firmly fixed in the mind of the colonel. "She is wonderfully like him, and yet there is a

"As well as could be wished," the other replied.

"The devil has made a favorable impression, then?"

"More than that; I think that Ernestine fell in love with him almost at first sight."

"It's lucky ye are!" exclaimed O'Shane, rubbing his hands together complacently; "and it's fifty thousand dollars that ye'll finger."

"Yes, if everything goes on all right," answered Elbert, but O'Shane saw at once that Van Tromp anticipated trouble.

"What's the matter? Is the devil trying to kick over the traces?" O'Shane was evidently anxious.

"I foolishly yielded to Ernestine's request to give him some of our old Madeira at dinner the other day. She thought that I was lacking in hospitality,



A SINGLE GLANCE AND THE CHEEKS GREW PALE, AND THE SMILE FADED INTO A LOOK OF HORROR.—Page 5.

paying her any attention at present. Do you know Elbert Van Tromp, of Madison avenue?"

"Van Tromp," said the colonel, reflectively; "well, it seems to me that the name is familiar, but—no, I don't think I know the family."

"They are old New York stock—came over with the original Netherlands. Well, this Elbert Van Tromp happened to receive an introduction to this young lady through one of the ladies of the house, whom he visits sometimes; an old friend of his mother, and they do say that he is quite struck with her."

"Is that really so?" The colonel took a strange interest in Rosaline Ameston and all that appertained to her.

"I think it likely," the clerk replied. "She's been

something in her face that is not in his. Something tells me, though, that, through her, I shall reach him. Perhaps that is only a mad delusion, though they did pronounce me cured when they let me go from the asylum."

It was far in the morning before the colonel slept.

CHAPTER XIV.

BLACKIE'S WEAKNESS.

A WEEK has passed away since the night when Alexander Blackie, late captain in the U. S. A., was introduced into the Van Tromp mansion.

O'Shane and Elbert Van Tromp, seated in the room of the latter, were discussing the situation.

"And how goes the game, me jewel?" asked O'Shane, between the puffs of a fragrant Havana.

of course, never dreaming why I had banished wine from the table."

"And the blaggard got drunk, of course, the thafe of the world, bad 'cess to him!" cried the Irishman in a rage.

"That is exactly the case," Van Tromp said. "He was not affected enough to stagger, but it got into his head, and I sat on thorns lest Ernestine should discover what the matter was with him."

"And didn't she?" asked O'Shane, in wonder.

"No; nor do I think that she had the slightest suspicion that there was anything the matter with him. Of course, never having been used to seeing men under the influence of liquor, she did not guess the truth."

"And what did you do wid him?"

"Got him up-stairs and locked him up in his room as soon as possible. I attempted to reason with him, but he only replied that he had cautioned me to keep liquor away from him, and that it was all my own fault."

"Oh, the haythen Turk!" growled O'Shane.

"You may rest assured that he'll get no more wine in this house!" exclaimed Van Tromp, decidedly.

"Wait till I get hold of him! I'll talk to him as if I was his grandmother!"

Then the door was flung violently open, and Blackie stalked into the room.

A single glance at the bloodshot eyes and the flushed face, and both Van Tromp and O'Shane gave utterance to a cry of rage.

Blackie had not only been drinking, but was decidedly drunk.

"Release me from my bond!" he cried, slamming the door behind him and striking a theatrical attitude. "I will not marry her, I swear it! Claude Melnotte slightly improved!"

Then Blackie helped himself to a chair.

Strange to say, the liquor had not seemed to affect his legs in the least, for he walked as straight as usual.

Van Tromp shut his teeth together in anger. He had hard work to restrain the impulse to seize Blackie and kick him out of the house.

"Oh, ye murdering devil, ye!" cried O'Shane, jumping to his feet, skipping up to Blackie with the agility of a dancing-master and shaking his fist in his face, a proceeding which amused Blackie hugely.

"Ha! ha! ha!" roared Blackie, in a fit of drunken laughter; "bravo! encore! do it again! all hands round—gentlemen to the left!" Then he darted up, seized O'Shane, waltzed him round the room despite his efforts to prevent him, and finally landed the exasperated Irishman on a lounge in the corner, all in a heap.

"Oh! I'm kilt entirely!" roared O'Shane, in his rage.

"Would you beard the lion in his den, the Douglas in his hall?" cried Blackie, with mock dignity; then he took possession of the easy-chair which O'Shane had occupied.

"So, you are drunk again!" Van Tromp exclaimed, angrily.

"And being drunk, am therefore an honest man once more!" replied Blackie, theatrically.

"What do you mean?" asked Van Tromp, in amazement.

"Just what I said, a moment ago. I will not keep my bond. I do repent me of my bargain. I love the sole daughter of the house of Van Tromp, and being drunk, my honesty gets the better of my knavish sober-self, and thereby prompts me to get myself kicked out of the house as speedily as possible, and thus save this poor girl from the cruel fate of becoming the wife of such a worthless wretch as I am."

"Kick him out at once, the dirty blaggard!" cried O'Shane, in a rage; "it's brock my back, he has!"

"Oh, you want to be off your bargain, do you?" Van Tromp spoke angrily and with flushed face.

"Yes; give me back my honest poverty and let me go back to my mud-gutter again!" cried Blackie, in a very theatrical way.

"Where did you get your liquor from?" asked Van Tromp, who could not understand how Blackie had contrived to procure any, as he had strictly instructed the butler to keep the wine-cellar locked and not allow any wine to be taken out without his order.

"Go ask your venerable colored coachman!" cried Blackie, in triumph. "You will find that dusky Adonis as full as a tick up on my bed. I bribed him with a five-dollar note to go out and get me a bottle of brandy. I am a thorough vagabond, and like Prince Hal, can drink with any tinker in the land in his own language."

"He puts the nagur on his bed, the dirty blaggard!" cried O'Shane, in disgust.

"Oh, no; he's a very clean African!" retorted Blackie—"a fellow-soldier too, a dusky son of Mars who shouldered the musket and kept step to the music of the Union. But, I'm sick of this affair. I've always been an honest man if I have been a drunken rascal, and this infamy is too much for me. So, kick me out at once and wind the comedy up."

"I really had an idea that you had fallen in love with the girl," Van Tromp remarked, quietly.

"And so I have," responded Blackie, "and that is the reason I have striven to drown my thoughts in drink; but it's no use; the liquor has lost its power."

"It's a sheet-iron throat ye have and a stomach of copper!" put in O'Shane, indignantly.

"It is too late for you to retreat now," Van Tromp said, firmly. "You are in love with the girl, and she loves you. If you desert her it will break her heart. It is the first love of her life. Possibly you can guess how great the blow will be to her."

"I am not worthy such an angel," Blackie retorted, moodily.

"Oh, she'll change after marriage!" O'Shane cried, confidently. "Faix! my wife was an angel before we were married, and a week after, she brock my head wid a poker."

"You can leave liquor alone if you want to do so," Van Tromp added. "You have been temperate for a week. Why, man, it's the turning point in your whole life. Here you have a young girl who loves you as she has never loved before and probably never will love again, a fortune, too, all within your grasp, and if you turn your back on this chance, what awaits you?"

"The gallows, bad 'cess to him!" muttered O'Shane, who had not yet forgotten the discomfort of his downfall.

"A drunkard's fate is written on the gates below," retorted Blackie, bitterly.

"Remember, she may get a far worse husband than you will make her, and can you calmly resolve to give up the woman that you love to another?" Van Tromp demanded.

"It is because I do love her that I wish to save her from such a miserable wretch as I am. I know that she loves me in return; I can read the truth in her face, and, scoundrel that I am, I have tried to make her love me, knowing, too, that I was but a tool in your hands."

Van Tromp winced. He did not like Blackie's words or manner.

"I do not know that there is any thing so very bad in our bargain," he said. "It is simply that you give me fifty thousand dollars for my influence with Ernestine, and as she has half a million coming to her, she will not miss it. Now, don't be a fool; lie down here, sleep off the effect of the liquor and try and keep away from it in future."

And after a good deal of persuasion, the two succeeded in getting Blackie to lie down; then they left the room.

"It's a difficult job ye'll have, maybe," suggested O'Shane, as they descended the steps that led into the street.

"Oh, no; the moment he gets the fumes of the liquor out of his head, he'll be all right. He loves the girl, and it isn't in human nature for a man to give up the woman he loves."

"True for ye, unless he has water in his veins instead of blood," O'Shane observed. "But, where are ye bound?"

"I am going to make a call upon the heiress that I told you of—Miss Ameston."

"And where does she live?"

"At the Hoffman House."

"I'll go down wid ye, me jewel."

CHAPTER XV.

THE DIAMOND BEAUTY.

The two hailed an omnibus, got in, and rode downtown.

Just as the stage reached Twentieth street, Van Tromp, who had been looking out of the window, suddenly called O'Shane's attention to a lady coming up the street.

"There she is now!" he exclaimed.

"And who is it?"

"Miss Ameston."

Van Tromp pulled the strap and the two got out.

"Come up to the house to-night," Van Tromp said, hurriedly, as he parted from O'Shane and advanced to the sidewalk to intercept the lady.

"All right, my jewel," replied O'Shane.

But Van Tromp had not waited for his reply. He stepped upon the curbstone just as Miss Ameston came up. She, seeing him, halted for a moment, shook hands with him, and then, accepting his proffered escort, they proceeded up the avenue.

And O'Shane, who had remained in the middle of the street, as if undecided which way to go, caught sight of the face of Rosaline Ameston.

"Oh, mother of Moses!" cried the Irishman, in utter astonishment; "is it awake or slaping I am?"

Then an omnibus driving at him at full tilt compelled him to make a hasty change of base to the sidewalk.

"Well, this bangs Bannagher!" he muttered, as he stood on the curbstone and gazed after the couple who were walking up the street; "and her diamonds, too, the crayture!—dew-drops set in gold! And it's Miss Rosaline Ameston ye are, and a heiress, too, and ye put up at the Hoffman House? Oh! would ye think of the likes of that? Bedad! it's Gorman O'Shane that will have the pleasure of callin' upon ye afore you're a day older."

He went direct to the Hoffman House, and entering, took up a position by one of the windows that commanded a view of the private entrance to the hotel used by the lady guests.

"Faix! I can't get over it at all, at all!" he muttered; "who the devil would expect to see her here?"

He did not have a very long time to wait, for within an hour he saw her coming down Broadway accompanied by Elbert Van Tromp. That gentleman parted with her though, and proceeded down Broadway, while she entered the hotel.

O'Shane had left the window on perceiving that she intended entering the hotel, and had preceded her up-stairs. He was not familiar with the interior of the hotel, but he had guessed that by going up-stairs he could see the lady as she entered, and could follow her, and thus ascertain where her apartments were situated.

Sauntering carelessly along, as though he was one of the guests of the house, O'Shane had the satisfaction of seeing the tall figure of the lady pass through the main hall and ascend one flight of stairs. He followed at a safe distance, and on the third floor he had the pleasure of seeing her unlock one of the doors in the hall and disappear.

"It's safe ye are, me jewel, now!" he cried, rubbing his hands together in great satisfaction. "Sure, she can't run away. Maybe she won't want to know me, but I'll try it; it will do no harm."

Then O'Shane approached the door and knocked softly.

"Come in!" said a female voice.

He opened the door and walked in.

The girl stood in the center of the room. She had just removed her cloak and was busy with the fastenings of her hat. There was a look of astonishment in the large gray-blue eyes as O'Shane closed the door behind him, and removing his hat bowed gallantly. But the appearance of the Irishman had not produced the result he had expected. She simply looked surprised, as she would have done at the intrusion of any stranger into her apartment uninvited.

"It's delighted I am to see ye," said O'Shane, with one of his elaborate bows.

"Sir!" exclaimed the lady, coldly, and her face gave no sign of recognition.

"Now, don't be after treating an old friend as if you had never set eyes on his face before. Faix! I mean ye no harm," the Irishman said, quite humbly; "I saw ye on Madison avenue to-day wid a mighty big friend of mine, Mr. Van Tromp; ask him, he'll tell you it's no lie. Sure, I'm a gentleman and mix wid the best of them. Maybe some day you'll want a service done, and where's a better man to do it than Gorman O'Shane, who was always your friend from the crown of his head to the sole of his foot! But if you don't want to know me, it's all right; I'll lave ye and never breathe a word to mortal that I ever saw you before; for, though Gorman O'Shane may depend upon his wits for the bite and sup, he's an Irish gentleman, and comes of decent people. What is it to be, Rosa; shall I go or stay?"

The girl removed her hat from her head, and laid it down upon the table, then she advanced to O'Shane and extended her hand.

"Stay, O'Shane," she said; "you always were a friend to me, and I'll not deny you now."

"Good luck to ye, me jewel!" cried the Irishman, in delight, kissing the slender white hand with as much reverence as though his lips touched the fingers of a queen. "Sure, ye always had a heart in yer body. Faix! ye could have knocked me down wid a feather when Van Tromp p'inted ye out to me to-day. 'There she is,' says he; 'Who?' says I; and then I looked and saw the face of dear little Rosa that I used to know long ago, and me heart was proud as I looked at the face of me own little Irish girl, as fresh as a daisy, and as sweet as cow's breath; and there she was a-holdin' up her head, the queen of them all!"

"Yes?" and a faint smile came over the pale face as she listened to her praise; "but, sit down," and she brought a chair, and placed it by the table. O'Shane seated himself, and then she brought another chair and sat down opposite to him.

"And can you see no change in my face?" she asked, resting her arm on the table and supporting her cheek on her hand.

"Yes, darlint, I can, I'm sorry to say it," O'Shane replied, after a long and earnest look into her face. "There's some ugly lines about the mouth and eyes, me jewel, that didn't used to be there. By the by, how's the owld man?" he asked, abruptly, as if the thought had just come to him.

Then there came a change over the girl's face; in a second she looked ten years older; the deep, dark lines came out, cruel and hard, and the look of the eyes grew strangely metallic.

"Sure, darlint!" he cried in alarm, "I didn't mane to wound ye. I ought to have known better than to have axed after the blaggard."

She held up her hand imperiously, as if to stop his speech.

"Not one word against him," she said, warningly; "it is not his fault. It is his fate to go through the world stumbling at every step."

"Yis, but he needn't carry you down wid him. Sure, it's you that breaks his fall by throwing yourself between him and the ground. It would be better for you if you lave him alone entirely, me jewel."

"We shall quarrel if you speak so about him!" cried the girl, almost fiercely. "You cannot understand it, but I love him better than I do anything on this earth, better by far than I do myself; and if he stood on the scaffold to-morrow, and I could save him by taking his place, I would gladly kiss the hands that placed the rope about my neck, and thus gain him his freedom."

"Faix! you women are queer animals sometimes," said the Irishman, reflectively. "It's often enough that ye sind a man to the devil, but it's not often that ye'll go to the devil for him."

"I would!" exclaimed the girl, firmly.

"I don't doubt ye, me jewel."

"But don't speak about him again; it is a painful subject to me," the girl said, slowly.

"Sure and I won't, darlint."

"You are acquainted with Mr. Van Tromp, you say?"

"Yis. Oh! it's bosom fri'nds we are. He's a foine b'y, and it's a purty sister he's got, too, wid a face like a wax-doll, all red and white."

"Yes; I have often heard him speak of his sister," she said, thoughtfully. "I think that he mentioned something about her to-day as he walked up the avenue. Ernestine is her name, isn't it?"

"Yis. Oh, she's a beauty—that is for men who like gurls of the wax-doll style. But I like beauty as I do my whisky—strong, and widout any water to weaken and sp'ile the flavor."

"I think he said something about her getting married soon."

"Oh, yis, that's likely. A foine young fellow, too, one Captain Blackie."

"What!" and the girl sprung to her feet in astonishment; "it cannot be Alexander Blackie, captain in a New York regiment, stationed at Nashville during the latter part of the war?"

CHAPTER XVI.

A WOMAN'S WILL.

O'SHANE looked at the girl in great astonishment. That she was greatly excited was plainly to be seen. "What the devil's the matter?" he asked, in wonder.

"This Captain Blackie who is to marry Ernestine Van Tromp, is he the one I have described?"

"Of course I can't answer for that," O'Shane rejoined. "His name is Alexander, and he was a captain in one of the New York regiments; but whether he was ever at Nashville or not, I can't say, but I can find out for ye, though, if ye want me to."

"He is about the medium height, not so tall as you are, brown hair and brown eyes, high white forehead, oval face, a very bright, pleasant smile," the girl said, eagerly.

"Sure! it's a fortune-teller ye are, for you've described him exactly!" cried O'Shane, in astonishment.

"And he is to marry that wax-doll beauty?"

"Yes, I believe so."

"Never!" cried the girl, fiercely, and starting to her feet, she paced rapidly up and down the room in a state of great excitement.

O'Shane looked at her in wonder.

"Oh, Rosie, darlint, what's come over ye?" he exclaimed. "Sure, it's as fierce as a wild-cat ye are."

"A woman of my nature is a wild-cat when she hears that the man she loves is about to marry another!" she replied, still pacing up and down, her hands clenched and every muscle in her frame quivering with passion.

"Oh, murder!" cried O'Shane, in astonishment; "here's a nice kettle of fish! But, Rosie, how is it that you love the captain? Sure, I've heard you say a hundred times that there would be only one love in your life, me jewel."

"Do we always keep to what we say in this world?" demanded the girl, in her imperious manner, halting suddenly and facing the Irishman. "I thought once that the one love that was in my heart would never permit another love to enter there, but my passion was stronger than my will, and this man fascinated me."

"Yis, it's a baste he is for putting 'the comither' over the gurls," said O'Shane, reflectively.

"But I can not understand," observed the girl, thoughtfully, her angry passion subsiding, and calm reflection taking its place.

"What is it that you can't understand, me jewel?"

demanding O'Shane. "Spake out, and it will be pleased I'll be to tell ye, if I can."

"Why, how can it be possible that Alexander Blackie can be a suitor for the hand of this wealthy heiress? I am sure that I have heard Elbert Van Tromp say that she would come into possession of an enormous fortune when she came of age."

"And so she will—a half-million at the latest."

"And Blackie, when I knew him—and it's not many years ago—was a wild, reckless fellow, without a penny that he could call his own, and half the time under the influence of liquor."

"He's the same now," replied O'Shane; "it's a born devil he is, sure; he nearly bruck my back an hour or so ago, when he threw me over a sofa with a grip like a playful elephant, bad 'cess to him!" and the Irishman rubbed his back, a rueful expression upon his face.

"And yet he is the accepted suitor for this girl's hand?" she exclaimed in wonder.

"True for ye."

"By what strange chance?"

"Elbert Van Tromp introduced him to her, and the little gurl fell in love wid the fascinating blaggard, wid his aisy ways in a twinkling."

A sigh came from the lips of the young woman. She remembered only too well how great had been her love for the wild, reckless young soldier, as the memory of the old time came back to her. The love was still strong in her heart, and she ground her teeth fiercely together as she thought of the man she had once adored as the plighted husband of another.

"The lady of course does not know what his past life has been," she said, slowly. "She little dreams that the golden idol her love has set up for worship is but common clay, scarred by many a flaw."

"Faix! she doesn't!" answered O'Shane, quickly; "she's devoted to him, the deluding devil that he is. I believe she'd marry him, too, even if she knew that he was fond of a drop of the 'crathur.' She'd be after thinking that she could reform him, maybe. That's a wakeness that you she-angels have when you fall in love."

"Yes, I thought so once," said the other, bitterly, "but I have seen more of the world now, and know better. A man who does not reform before marriage will very seldom do so afterward. That delusion has wrecked the happiness of many a woman."

"True for ye, Rosie dear; but I say, me colleen, sure ye'll not be after making trouble in this affair?" queried the Irishman, persuasively. "If I was you I wouldn't set eyes on the blaggard ag'in."

But O'Shane in this speech had overshot the mark. He had said entirely too much.

The girl looked at him just a moment with her full, clear eyes in such a way that the man felt decidedly uncomfortable; then a scornful smile came over the beautiful face as she noticed the uneasiness of the Irishman. His gaze sunk to the ground, unable to endure the steady glance of the gray-blue eyes.

The girl's lip curled in contempt, and with an expression of annoyance, she threw herself into the chair which she had occupied.

"Sure, you're angry with me now, darlint," O'Shane said, very humbly, raising his eyes to the girl's face.

"Yes, I am!" she said, abruptly.

"And why? What have I done?" asked the Irishman in profound humility.

"You are acting against and not for me," she replied, imperiously.

"Bekase I want to keep you away from that thafe of the world."

"And why do you want to do that?" she demanded, abruptly. "To serve me? Is that your only motive?"

"Why, yis, of course."

"You can't deceive me, O'Shane! I know you too well. You have some other motive. What can it matter to you whether I see this man or not? Why should you wish me not to interfere with his marriage with this lady? What possible interest can you have in the matter at all?"

"That's what I say!" he exclaimed, with an appearance of frank unconcern; "what is it to me?"

"I'll find that out before I sleep to-night!" she cried, in a tone which struck terror to the heart of the Irishman. "You said that if I wished a service you would gladly perform it."

"And I'll stick to that, me darlint!" replied O'Shane, with an appearance of warmth which he was far from feeling.

"I'll put your truth to the test," she continued, and there was a look in her dark eyes which O'Shane did not like at all.

"Do, if it will plaze ye," he answered; "I'm ready and willing, me jewel."

"Go and find Alexander Blackie and bring him here to me," she commanded, with emphasis.

O'Shane rose in alarm.

"Oh, me jewel, don't ax me to do such a foolish thing as that!"

"Do you want me to go and find him myself?" The tone of the woman plainly showed that she was in earnest.

"Sure! you wouldn't be after doing that, Rosie, darlint?" he questioned, persuasively.

"O'Shane, you knew me pretty well in the old time; did you ever know me to turn back from the accomplishment of a purpose when I had once set my heart upon it?" she demanded.

"Never!" replied the Irishman, decidedly.

"Well, will you do as I request?"

"Sure, there's no use going for Blackie; I'll tell you the whole thing from beginning to end!" exclaimed O'Shane, coming to the conclusion that further deception was useless, and resuming his seat. "The little gurl Ernestine is to have her money when she gets to be twenty-one; that'll be in three or four months. She's never had a lover in her life, so Van Tromp he got me to hunt out Blackie; then he dressed him up like a gentleman, and introduced him to the wax beauty as an old friend of his, and invited him to stop with them while he was in the city. So the little gurl fell in love with Blackie; and that's all of it."

"But the motive!" exclaimed Rosaline, who knew that O'Shane was concealing something. "Why should Van Tromp wish Blackie to marry the girl? and why is it that you, too, are anxious about the matter?"

"There's no deceiving you, me jewel, I see. Well, I'll make a clean breast of it. Blackie has agreed to give Van Tromp fifty thousand dollars of his wife's

fortune after he marries her, and I'm to have a hundred dollars for my trouble in finding Blackie."

"A hundred dollars!" and the girl's proud lip curled, "and you weighted your friendship for me against a hundred dollars! Why didn't you speak out? I would have given you the hundred willingly."

O'Shane rose to his feet as if he had been moved by a spring and drew himself up with dignity.

"Take your money!" he cried; "bad 'cess to the take! Sure it would have choked me if I had put a cent in my pocket."

Rosaline smiled, then rose to her feet and extended her hand to him.

"You are the same faithful friend as ever. Now go tell Captain Blackie that Rosaline Ameston, formerly of Nashville, Tennessee, wishes to see him."

"I'll do it, bedad!" he cried. "But I say, Rosie, is it to bruck the marriage off that ye'll be after?"

"Wait and see; now go at once," she replied.

And in five minutes' time O'Shane was on his way to the Van Tromp mansion.

CHAPTER XVII.

A LOVER'S FAITH.

STEWART looked at the white face of the fair young girl, who was held so tightly to his breast, in deep astonishment. He could hardly believe the evidence of his ears.

The face of Mary was as white as the face of the dead; not a trace of color was there in the cheeks; even the full, pouting lips, which were wont to be so rich in their scarlet beauty, had now faded to a pale, dull pink; the eyes were closed, and the long, dark lashes were crusted by tear-drops.

The breath of the girl was coming quick and fast, and the convulsive heaving of her bosom plainly told of the anguish which swelled in the heart beneath.

"A stain upon you?" murmured Stewart, unable and unwilling to believe that he had heard aright. "Not worthy to be my wife? Why, Mary, what do you mean by such dreadful words? For heaven's sake, explain!"

But the girl replied not; she only nestled closer and closer to her lover, and sighed as if her heart would break.

"Mary, won't you speak?" he asked, and the deep tone of his voice betrayed that in part he shared in the girl's emotion.

"What can I say?" she replied, slowly, her voice broken by half-suppressed sobs.

"Tell me that my ears deceived me—that you have not said that you were not worthy to be mine."

"I can not," she said, slowly.

A moment Stewart gazed at the pale face, his brows knitted in deep thought, then, with a sudden movement, he bent his head until the stray locks of his jet-black hair mingled with the brown tresses of the girl, and gently he kissed away the tear-drops, which were slowly stealing from under the long dark lashes down over the pallid cheeks.

"Mary, you are the first girl that I have ever asked to be my wife in all my life," he said, slowly, between the fond, tender kisses. "You are the first girl that I have ever really loved. I will frankly confess to you that I have tried not to love you. I fought against the passion, which I was conscious was growing up in my heart, with all my power. The struggle ended when I took you in my arms to-night; the first touch of your soft, sweet lips sealed my fate. I felt that hereafter the world to me would be a blank unless you choose to share it with me. Your flushed face, humid eyes and the touch of your loving lips all told me that you were mine in heart, that you loved me. And now, that I put the sweet question, you utter words in reply which chill my heart and make me wish that we had never met."

"Oh, I know how you must suffer by the anguish that is in my heart," moaned the girl, winding her soft arms still tighter and tighter around him. "I have been so weak and foolish. I knew from the first that it could not be, and yet I could not find it in my heart to repulse you. I knew that you loved me; your eyes told me that. I knew that I loved you in return; my heart was so full of you that there was no room left for any thing else. Ever since the night when we first met, sleeping or waking, your image has ever been before me. At first I yielded to the hopeless love and did not try to crush it from my heart. I let you put your arm around my waist when we stood looking at the plants the last time you were here. I let your cheek touch mine. It was madness, but I could not resist it. And to-night I let you kiss my lips, I am so weak. By a single word, a look even, I might have stopped you. I have been so foolish, but now my punishment has come. I would not murmur, would not utter a single word, but my foolish weakness will cause you to suffer. I shall never forgive myself."

Stewart listened silently to the girl's disjointed sentences, only bending his head now and then as she paused, to kiss away a tear trickling down the pale cheek.

"Mary, you have not yet told me why our love is hopeless," he said, softly. "You have bitterly accused yourself, but you have not yet given me proof that the accusation is just."

"Am I not the best judge of that?" she asked, slowly, never once raising her tear-swollen eyes to his face. "The love that is in my heart is so strong that I would willingly give half my life to enjoy the rest with you."

"No; perhaps you are not really the best judge," he said, quietly. "Come, confide in me. Surely my love may ask for more than this of you and yet not be refused."

"No, no, I cannot tell you," she answered, hurriedly, and, as she spoke, Stewart noticed that she trembled within his arms like an aspen leaf.

Slowly he withdrew his arms from their clasp around the slight form. She guessed the reason, but did not attempt to prevent the action—rather, she shrunk from him.

"So you are willing that we should part at once and never see each other again?" he asked, slowly.

"Yes," she murmured, faintly, and the word cost her a flood of noiseless tears, which wet the fresh young cheeks like fine rain. Unable to restrain her sobs, she despairingly hid her face in her hands.

A single instant only Stewart looked upon the form of the girl he loved so well, quivering with emotion, and then again he wound his arms around

her and clasped her tightly to him, imprinting a hundred tender, loving kisses upon the cold, anguish-stricken face.

She did not resist the action; his arms were an earthly heaven to her. Soon the convulsive sobs ceased, the wildly heaving bosom calmed into a gentle and regular rise and fall, and again the head, so perfect in its beauty, rested upon the broad, manly shoulder of her lover. Within the shelter of his embrace was peace and rest for her, and yet she knew that it was but for the moment; that hours of misery would surely follow the minutes of happiness.

"Can you refuse to answer the question that my love asked?" he said, softly, yet earnestly, as, with a light and gentle touch, he smoothed back the silken brown locks from the white forehead.

"There are more reasons than one," she murmured; she was stooping to evasion to spare him pain.

"What are they?"

"You are very rich—"

"How do you know that?" he asked, quickly, interrupting her.

"Peter, the porter of the store where Mary works, knows both you and Mr. Weathers. He used to work for your father. He lives down-stairs, and saw you and Mr. Weathers when you went out the other night, and the next day he told Chocolate all about you."

"Mary, would my riches keep you from marrying me if there was no other obstacle in the way?"

The girl was silent.

"Answer me, please," he said, pleadingly.

"No," she replied, softly. She could not tell him a deliberate falsehood.

"My own dear little girl," he said, fondly, "I was sure of that before I asked the question. Confess, now, there is only one obstacle between us; is not that the truth?"

"Yes," she replied, slowly. While the pressure of his arms was about her, she could not have told him an untruth to have saved herself from instant death.

"Only one obstacle!" he repeated; "and the nature of that obstacle you will not tell me?"

"I have already told you that," she replied; "I am not worthy to be your wife."

"Ah, yes!" he exclaimed, a peculiar smile coming over his proud face, which hitherto had worn such a dark cloud. "You said, too, that there was a stain upon you."

"Yes, yes." The word seemed to come with a pang.

"And does that stain come from act of yours or from another?" he asked, slowly, and he watched narrowly the pale face that lay so trustingly upon his shoulder. Again he saw the convulsive shudder shake the slight form nestled with such confiding love in his warm embrace.

"Do not ask me," she murmured, in deep agitation, "but believe that what I say is the truth. Oh! you would spurn me from you in horror, if you only knew what a wretched creature you hold within your arms."

"I do not think so," he replied, quietly, and, as he spoke, again he kissed the white forehead. "If you had committed any act to stain your fair, young womanhood, you would not rest so quietly within my arms. The red flush of shame does not crimson your cheek when you say that you are unworthy to be my wife. I am sure that the stain which may be upon your life was not stamped there by any act of yours. When I kiss your lips, I feel sure that I press the lips of a good, pure girl, one who would not deceive the man she loves, and one who would never have let that man touch her lips if she had been in herself unworthy of him."

Like one in a trance, Mary had listened to the impassioned words of Stewart. The man of ice possessed a heart of fire. With a desperate effort, she strove to free her senses from the spell of love which he had woven around them.

"No, no; think me unworthy of you in every way!" she said, hurriedly, and in great agitation. "Learn to despise me, and then you will soon be able to forget. Scorn, contempt, will conquer love."

"No, Mary!" he replied, firmly, "that I can never do. I am sure of your love, and I will not resign you without a struggle, and, since you will not tell me what I wish to know, I will find it out for myself if it takes me all the rest of my life!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

WEATHERS'S WOOING.

For full five minutes there was silence in the little room. The girl still rested her head upon Stewart's shoulder; her eyes shut, she seemed like one in a trance. Stewart still watched the pale face, so sweet in its fresh young beauty, and wondered from whence had come the blight which had fallen upon her young life.

At last, with a long-drawn sigh, Mary raised her head, passed her hand wearily across her forehead and down her cheek; a motion without a reason, and yet one that plainly told of intense mental pain.

Stewart watched her closely, and on his sober face painful anxiety was visibly stamped.

The eyes of the girl sought the ground, and again she sighed deeply.

"Mary, why not confide your sorrow to me?" he asked, impulsively; "can you not trust me with your secret?"

She shook her head slowly, but did not reply.

"Mary, I am rich," he said, a sudden idea flashing across his mind. "In this world money will sometimes accomplish wonders, almost work miracles. Few things in this life that money will not buy. Tell me then the nature of the obstacle between us, and perhaps with money I may be able to sweep it aside."

"No, no," she responded, "that is impossible. Oh, you make me love you so much when I hear you speak so nobly! But you must forget me. You will find some one else to love some day, some woman whom you may be able to love as fondly as you now love me; who may love you as well as I do now, but love you better she can not!"

Slowly the girl had raised her eyes to his while she spoke, and then, with a sudden, impulsive motion, as the last word came from her trembling lips, she threw her arms around his neck and impressed a single kiss upon his cheek, and then as quickly again retreated from him.

"Mary, I can not find it in my heart to resign you!" he exclaimed, firmly; "sooner or later I shall learn the truth."

"And when you do learn it, then you will despise me fully as much as you now love me," she said, mournfully.

"I will not believe that until I am convinced of it beyond the shadow of a doubt," he replied, in a tone which carried conviction with it.

"I shall be so lonesome without you," she half sighed. "I have only seen you a few times, but I have learned to wait and watch for your coming."

"You think then that you will not see me any more?" he said, and a faint smile came over his face.

"You will not wish to come and see me after what I have told you," she said, sadly.

"I shall most assuredly come until you tell me that my visits are disagreeable to you."

"That can never be!" she exclaimed, quickly, and her manner betrayed that she had been hurt by the thought.

Stewart glanced at his watch.

"Five minutes past ten! It is time for us to part. May I come next Saturday night?"

"If you wish to come, I can not bid you stay away, and yet I feel that it would be better for us both if we should never see each other again." There was a mournful sound in the girl's voice as she spoke.

"When I discover that there really is a reason why you never can be mine, then I will bid you good-by, but not until then," he said, as he rose to his feet. "Come, one last kiss," and he extended his arms.

Strange power had he over the girl, for, without a murmur, she obeyed his lightest wish. Even with the word, she gave herself to his embrace and held up her lips to him.

And while in torment and agony the course of Stewart and Mary's love had run so far from smooth, Weathers and Chocolate, in the outer room, had been having a delightful time. The girl, naturally lively and intelligent, and Weathers, who was always full of fun, got on splendidly together. Weathers, in the course of the conversation, seized upon every possible opportunity to make fun of the sharp-eyed Chocolate, and she, while pretending to be "teased out of her life," enjoyed it hugely.

Finally, in the course of the conversation, she happened to call him Mr. Weathers, much to his astonishment, and of course he instantly inquired how she knew his real name. Then she explained about Peter.

"Hang it!" exclaimed Weathers, regretfully. "I rather liked the name of Montgomery; it's decidedly high-toned and aristocratic."

"I like your own name just as well," Chocolate said; "but what is your first name?"

"Napoleon," Weathers replied, with a wry face.

"Well, now, that's nice."

"Do you think so?" he asked, thoughtfully. "Well, do you know that name has always seemed so completely ridiculous to me? The idea of a little fat fellow like me struggling under a name like Napoleon! It isn't so bad, you know, when they reduce it down to Nap. You see, my father had an intense admiration for the first Napoleon, and named me after him. I tell you, Miss Crofkin, we used to have fun in the soap factory, when we got some unsuspecting stranger to abuse Napoleon in the presence of my father, and then the way the old man would 'rare' round and 'cuss' was a caution."

"Oh, you naughty boy!" and she made a face at him. "But what did you call me just now?"

"Miss Crofkin; that's your name, isn't it?"

"Yes; but I'd rather you wouldn't call me that, it sounds so odd. Almost everybody calls me either Mary or Chocolate."

"And I can take my choice, eh?"

"Yes, 'hay?'" and she imitated him.

"Chocolate be it, then; there's something odd and peculiar about that, like yourself."

"Why, I'm not odd and peculiar, am I?" Chocolate asked, and she opened her eyes in wonder.

"Well, yes; you're different from any girl that I have ever seen. You're so straightforward, honest, no nonsense about you, you know," he said, in his blunt way.

"I'm sure you're very complimentary," and Chocolate laughed.

"By the way, how about Peter?" asked Weathers, suddenly; "he's your beau, isn't he?"

"No, he isn't!" cried the girl, quickly, and she looked decidedly annoyed. "Now, don't you begin about Peter. They bother me almost to death at the shop about him, and it's all because he happens to live in the same house and walks home with me once in awhile. Why, I told you the other night that the only Peter I cared for was this one." And then Chocolate made a dive behind the stove and brought out the gray-and-white cat from his concealment in the fireplace.

Weathers took the cat on his knee and endeavored to make friends with the lanky beast, but the cat was afraid of strangers, and made a desperate effort to escape. Weathers, to prevent it, seized the animal by one of its paws, and the result was that "Peter," believing that his catship was in deadly peril, used his teeth and claws so effectively upon Weathers's hand as to make that gentleman drop him instantly, and he at once sought safety in the obscure recesses of the fireplace.

"Oh!" exclaimed Weathers, displaying his hand, whereon the marks of Peter's claws and teeth were "raced in lines of blood," "see what your interesting cat has done! Look at my hand!"

"Peter didn't know any better; you grabbed him so roughly that he thought that he was going to be hurt," Chocolate said in defense of the cat. "But I'm real sorry he has scratched you. Let me make it well." And then she applied her lips to the scratches on the hand and proceeded to suck out the poison left by teeth and claws. And as the girl knelt down by his side, Weathers could not resist the temptation of putting his arm around her waist—a proceeding to which she made no objection; but a slight tinge of color crept over her face, and her bright eyes shone with a shy, soft light.

"You won't be angry with Peter, will you?" she asked, as she rose to her feet.

"Oh, I freely forgive him," Weathers replied magnanimously; "I suppose that you are fond of him?"

Chocolate nodded assent.

"How would you like a nice little dog?" Weathers asked, as a sudden thought occurred to him. "A friend of mine offered me one the other day."

"I should like one very much indeed," she replied.

Then Stewart, coming from the other room, interrupted the conversation. He was followed by Mary, who looked pale and sad.

The two bid the girls farewell and took their departure, promising to call again on the following Saturday.

"You gave Mary the measure for the shirts?" Weathers asked, after they had got into the street.

"Yes," Stewart replied.

Then Weathers noticed that Stewart seemed strangely abstracted. He inquired the cause, and Stewart, contrary to his wonted custom, confided all his troubles to his friend.

Weathers listened attentively, and was considerably astonished at the recital.

"I don't believe it!" he cried, emphatically; "the girl is good and pure, I'm sure of it. She's got some peculiar idea into her head, that's all."

"You think that I acted wisely then, in not giving the girl up?" Stewart asked. He had great faith in the strong common sense of Weathers.

"Decidedly so!" Weathers replied. "And I'll tell you what I'll do, I'll get Chocolate to find out all about it."

And Stewart felt strangely comforted by this assurance.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE MAN IN GRAY.

GORMAN O'SHANE, Esq., as he delighted to style himself, left the presence of Rosaline Ameston a little bewildered in his mind.

"What the devil does she want to see that thafe of the world, Blackie, for?" he muttered, as he descended the stairs of the hotel. "Is it to break off the marriage between him and the wax-doll beauty I wonder? Arrah! these women are at the bottom of all trouble in this world, and have been, too, since the days of Eve. Oh, why didn't father Adam have the apple alone, bad 'cess to him?" By the time he had finished his reflections he had gone down to the office. Passing through, he emerged upon the sidewalk.

He hesitated for a moment.

"Shall I take an omnibus, or walk?" he muttered; then, after thinking for a moment, he decided to walk. So, proceeding through the cross street, he went at once to Madison avenue.

As he turned the corner of the avenue he happened to glance behind him, and noticed a gentleman, dressed in a dark-gray suit, coming leisurely up the street, following in his track. This fact of course had nothing in connection with it to call for any particular attention from O'Shane, except that the face and form of the man in gray seemed to be familiar to him.

"Be gobs! I've seen him before somewhere," O'Shane muttered; yet at the instant he could not remember where. But there was nothing in this fact either to call for especial remark, and O'Shane went on his way up the avenue.

But, as he walked briskly onward he speculated as to what would be the result of the coming interview between the diamond beauty and the wild and reckless Blackie.

"Faix! the fat will be in the fire, sure!" he muttered. "She loves him, the thafe of the world, wid his alsy, illigant ways, and sure she's not the woman to give him up to another. The Irish blood in her veins is up, and she'll take him away from the other gurl out of spite. It's a blundering blockhead I am! I ought to have kept my tongue between my teeth, and not have been after letting the cat out of the bag. Sorra a taste of that hundred dollars will I get at all, at all. Faix! I never open my mouth but I put my foot in it!" and O'Shane cut viciously at the air with the light switch cane which he carried. "Oh! the blunderhead that I am! When I went to the house, why didn't I keep away?" and again he whirled his cane around and cut at the air. Then, suddenly remembering that he was giving vent to his emotions in the open street, he looked around to see if any one was noticing him.

And as he looked back, to his astonishment, he discovered that the man in gray was coming up the street behind him. A low whistle came from the lips of the Irishman. All at once the knowledge of where he had seen that man before flashed upon him.

As he had followed Rosaline up the stairs of the Hoffman House he had noticed this man lounging carelessly in the hallway of the hotel, and then after the interview with her, coming on again into the entry he had again seen the man in gray sauntering listlessly up and down the hallway. At the time, of course, he had not thought that there was any thing worthy of notice in the affair, but now that the man in gray seemed to be dogging his footsteps, O'Shane began to be uneasy.

"It's after me, sure, he is," the Irishman muttered, and then carefully in his mind he reviewed the transactions in which he had taken part during the last year. "I've done nothing at all," he mused, satisfied that he had no part in any action likely to place a spy upon his footsteps. "What does the blaggard mane by follering me? Be me soul! if I thought that it was follering me that he was after, I'd turn round and ax him what he wanted."

And all this time O'Shane had been walking briskly on, and the man in gray still steadily followed in his track.

"Bedad!" cried O'Shane, suddenly, "I'll find out if it's me you're after" me jewel, and, if it is, I'll come to the fore wid an explanation, ye blaggard, or me name's not Gorman O'Shane!"

And, acting on this thought, O'Shane turned into Thirtieth street, and went through it to Fifth avenue, then up Fifth avenue to Thirty-first street, and through Thirty-first street to Madison avenue again.

O'Shane had kept a close watch upon the gentleman in gray, taking advantage of turning the corners to glance carelessly behind without betraying to the pursuer that he had a suspicion he was being followed, and, to O'Shane's intense disgust, he found that the man followed him closely, yet without apparently paying any attention to him.

"The blaggard is after me, sure enough!" he muttered, in anger, twirling the light cane violently in the air. He had just turned into Madison avenue, and the follower was coming up Thirty-first street. Then a sudden thought came into O'Shane's mind, and he halted suddenly.

"Bedad! I'll lay a trap for ye, me jewel!" he exclaimed, and he whisked the switch through the air gleefully. "I'll make ye explain what ye mane, ye blaggard, by follering a jintleman like Gorman O'Shane through the streets of New York. He's some dirty spy of an informer, I'll go bail, but sorra's the charge they can bring ag'in' me. Faix! my conscience is clear."

O'Shane was only some ten or twelve steps from the corner, and he turned back and advanced quickly until he was only a yard or so from it, and then, as he heard the steps of the other advancing at Thirty-first street, he stepped briskly forward and met the man in gray face to face on the corner.

It was the Virginian, Colonel Campbell!

He did not appear at all astonished as the Irishman stepped suddenly in his way and compelled him to halt.

"I beg your pardon, sir," said O'Shane, drawing himself up stiffly.

"You needn't beg my pardon; you don't owe me anything," said the colonel, placidly, and not in the least ruffled by the decidedly offensive manner of the Irishman.

"Then I won't beg your pardon!" cried O'Shane, enraged at the man's manner.

"It don't make the slightest bit of difference to me whether you beg my pardon or don't beg it," returned the Virginian, coolly.

"See here, what do you mane by follering me?" exclaimed O'Shane, beginning to lose his temper.

"Following you?" said the colonel, apparently astonished at the accusation.

"Yis!" replied O'Shane, angrily; "it's of no use for ye to deny it! I've kept me eyes on ye, me beauty."

"Oh, you have?" questioned the colonel, in the quietest manner possible.

"Yis, I have," retorted O'Shane, exasperated by the coolness of the other.

"And you think that I have been following you?"

"I know ye have! It's no use for ye to attempt to deny it!"

"Well, if it's of no use, I won't attempt to deny it," and the colonel actually looked into the face of the other and smiled.

The Irishman took a firmer gripe of his light cane and felt a very strong inclination to lay it over the back of the man in gray, but, with a great effort, he restrained his angry passions.

"And is it a spy of the dirty police ye are?" cried O'Shane, in withering contempt. "Maybe ye'd like to know who and what I am. There's my card, sir," and O'Shane shoved the little piece of pasteboard under the nose of the stranger.

He, without manifesting any anger at all, coolly read the name.

"Gorman O'Shane. You're an Irishman, eh?"

"And what's that to the likes of you?" demanded O'Shane, fiercely.

"What is that to me?" retorted the colonel, in surprise; "nothing at all that I'm aware of. I only mentioned the fact, just as I would have done if you had been a Dutchman or a Frenchman."

"Have ye any business wid me?" demanded O'Shane, utterly astounded at the coolness of a perfect stranger.

"Not that I am aware of, sir."

"And which way are ye going?" questioned O'Shane, hotly.

"My first impression is to reply that that is none of your business," returned the colonel, not in the least excited; "and my second—which I shall follow—is to ask what possible interest that can be to you?"

"Because I don't choose to have ye spying me any more!" exclaimed O'Shane, in anger. "Be gobs! I've half a mind to dust your jacket!" and O'Shane flourished the switch vigorously in the air.

"You might be worried if you tried it," the colonel said, tersely.

And then the two men measured each other with their eyes.

O'Shane, hot-headed and hot-blooded as he was, could not help perceiving that in physical strength he was no match for the stoutly-built stranger, who had also the advantage of years on his side; so, with a great effort, he swallowed his rage as best he could.

"Ye know who I am, me foine fellow, and, if it's wanted I am, it's mighty aisy to find me widout putting a spy upon me," O'Shane said, with dignity; then he turned upon his heel and proceeded up the street. He never once glanced behind him, but, as he ascended the steps of the Van Tromp mansion, his eyes caught sight of the man in gray, still following him, a block or so down the avenue.

CHAPTER XX.

ERNESTINE'S TRUST.

BLACKIE sat in the parlor of the Van Tromp mansion. Two hours of sleep had banished all traces of liquor from his face, and he looked as careless and as happy as usual; yet every now and then, a cloud would come over his face and for a few minutes he would appear to be lost in thought.

His meditations were interrupted by the entrance of Ernestine Van Tromp.

She came into the parlor, evidently expecting to find it unoccupied, and she gave just a little bit of a start when Blackie rose from the recesses of the easy-chair and advanced to meet her.

"I am so glad you have come," he said, in his frank, careless way. "I have one of my sad fits on and I was just wishing for some music to drive it away. Will you play for me?"

"Oh, yes, with pleasure," the girl answered, and, yet, though she complied so quickly, her voice trembled as she spoke, and a faint blush stole into her cheeks and forehead.

She seated herself at the piano while he leaned on the side of the instrument, his old position.

"What shall I play?" she questioned.

"Any thing you like," he replied, and as he spoke he gazed upon her with such an expression in his dark, luminous eyes that the girl felt sadly ill at ease.

Never in all her life had she seemed to play so badly. It was an old, familiar waltz, so simple, so easy, and yet she could not play it through correctly, and at last gave it up in despair.

Blackie had watched the face of the girl narrowly; an old, experienced man of the world, twenty times

at least had he whispered sweet words into some fair girl's ears, and seen the eyelids droop and the red blush kindle on the cheeks and pearly forehead; and now, the face of Ernestine Van Tromp was like an open book to him, and what he read therein made his heart leap with a fierce throb of joy.

The girl was turning over the music-pages listlessly, endeavoring to hide her confusion.

"Why, Ernestine, how nervous you are," he said, carelessly.

She gave just a little start; he had never called her Ernestine before, and never in all her life had she heard the name sound so sweetly.

"I am such a wretched player," she answered, avoiding his glance.

"Ah, you must not say that!" he exclaimed, lightly. "I am sure you play excellently, sometimes."

"Yes; but I can not play at all to-day."

"But, you have driven my dull thoughts away already," he replied, gayly. "See how much I owe you!"

A faint smile came over her face as she listened to his words, but she did not speak.

"I suppose that I must bid you good-by soon," he continued.

With a sudden start, Ernestine rose to her feet, and an anxious look came over her face and shone in the depths of her great, blue eyes. If Blackie had wanted proof that she cared for him, the start and look would have convinced him.

"You are going away?" she asked, evidently very much surprised.

"Yes, I must go," he answered, softly, and he half-averted his face from her.

"But I thought that you intended to make quite a long stay with us? Elbert told me so," she said, anxiously.

"Yes, I did intend to stay longer, but—" and Blackie hesitated.

"But what?" asked the girl, quickly. "Is there a reason why you wish to go away?" and she came close to his side and laid her little white hand upon his arm.

"Yes."

"And you will tell me that reason, won't you?" she said, imploringly. "I hope that you are not offended at any thing?"

"Offended!" cried Blackie, impulsively, and acting on the spur of the moment, he placed his arm around the slender waist of the girl. The fair red and white face, so regular in its beauty, was flushed crimson with the tell-tale blood as she felt the slight pressure of his arm around her waist. The golden lashes came slowly down until they rested on the soft cheek, and the clear blue eyes, so round and so innocent, were hid from view.

A moment Blackie gazed into the tell-tale face and his heart told him that the girl was his without a word, and yet he spoke, for he had much to say.

"No, Ernestine, you have all treated me like a prince ever since I have been beneath this roof. I am going away because I feel that I am in danger here."

"In danger?" she murmured, slowly.

"Yes, and that danger comes from you."

"From me?" and the heart of the girl throbbed convulsively as she spoke the simple words; the air around her seemed full of sweet incense, her head swayed, she was conscious of one thing only, that his arm encircled her waist and his breath fanned her cheek.

"Yes, from you," he repeated. "I feel that I cannot stay in your presence longer and remain silent; I must tell you the thoughts that are in my heart or fly far from the sweet witchery of your presence. Shall I speak or be silent? go or stay?"

Oh! what an effort it cost the girl to utter one little word—a word, too, which filled her soul with happiness. The truant blood leaped wildly in her veins, it flushed her face and mounted even to her brain. But at last, after what seemed an age of delicious joy, she spoke:

"Stay."

A little word, so lightly uttered, that it seemed more like the echo of a sound than the sound itself.

But to the quick ears of the lover, the sweet whisper of assent sounds in trumpet tones.

"My own dear girl!" he said, fondly. "But, Ernestine, before I speak, listen to the history of him who has forgotten prudence, strong resolutions, and almost forgotten honor, enchanted by the witchery of your dear self. You are a wealthy heiress while I am penniless. You have everything and I nothing. Besides, I am a wild and reckless fellow, who has not passed untouched through the temptations of the world. I am so far beneath you, Ernestine, not only in wealth and social position, but in habits and temper, that to dare to hope to raise my eyes to you were as foolish as the madman's desire to pluck down one of the stars from the sky to pin upon his mantle. Ernestine, I do not love, I worship you."

The girl's quick ears were drinking deep in the honey of his words, and after the last cadence had fallen on the air, and no sound broke the stillness save the long-drawn breath and the quick pulsations of the two beating hearts, like one under the influence of a spell, she remained motionless and silent.

Blackie, with an anxious gaze, watched the wax-like face.

At last, with a sudden motion, the girl seemed to break the influence of the spell and regain the use of her tongue.

"I knew that I was rich and that you were not when we first met," she said. "I think that the woman who truly loves will never let riches weigh, even for a single moment, in the scale against love. 'Weigh nothing 'gainst love, weigh love against the world!' Remember, you taught me that, and I am an apt scholar. The more a woman can give the one she loves, the greater must be her pleasure in giving it."

"And do you remember my social position?" he asked, furnishing her with weapons to use against himself.

"You are a gentleman, and have been an officer in the service of your country; are there any higher titles in our republic?"

"No; but, Ernestine, there may be another reason why I am not worthy to seek your hand." Slowly the words came; had each one been a drop of blood, they could not have cost him more pain.

"I do not think that by any act of yours you will

ever disgrace the woman who trusts all her happiness in your keeping," was the confident reply.

"Ernestine, I will not, cannot deceive you. I have been a wild and foolish man. I was like a dismantled wreck drifting along, caring nothing for the past and but little for the future. I had no ambition—no hope in life. I rather sought temptation than avoided it. Then, I met you. Your face to me was like the sight of land to the shipwrecked sailor, a possibility that in this life there might yet be happiness for me. And when I look back at what my life has been, I ask myself, am I worthy to try for the love of such a girl as you are? But, in spite of myself, I have spoken. My love blinded my reason, and I thought of nothing but my love. I have been a slave to a vice which crushes the best of a man's nature."

"I knew your fault," she said, gently; "I am not blind, though Elbert may think me so. You are a slave to wine. Can you not give that up for the sake of the woman who loves you?"

"And do you dare to trust me?" he asked, trembling as he put the question.

"Trust you!"

A single moment she looked him in the face, and then blushing she laid her head down upon his shoulder.

And by that act Ernestine confessed her love.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE FAMILY SKELETON.

FOR full five minutes the lovers remained motionless; their happiness was too great for words. Then Ernestine gently withdrew herself from the embrace of her lover, her fair face covered with blushes.

"Come, sit down," she said, extending her hand to him. "Since you have spoken so freely to me it is but right that I should be equally frank with you."

Blackie wondered at these words, as well as at the serious look which came over the face of the girl.

The two sat down by one of the windows, yet far enough from it, shaded as they were by the heavy curtain, to escape notice from any passer-by in the street.

Blackie sat in the great easy-chair, while the girl drew an ottoman by his side, and sunk gracefully down on it, resting her arm upon the chair, and looking up into Blackie's face.

His arm stole gently around the slender waist, and he imprisoned one of her little hands within his own.

The gaze of Ernestine, which at first had sought Blackie's face, dropped gradually to the floor, and the loving look which her face had worn, as she felt the pressure of her lover's touch, gave way to an anxious expression. Blackie had watched the changing of her face in wonder; he could not divine the nature of the communication which the maiden seemed to hesitate to make, and he waited in silence for her to speak.

At last she looked up suddenly in his face:

"Do you remember what Bulwer says in one of his works? 'Wise judges are we of each other!' I have often thought how apt—how true the words are. Only a few minutes ago you confessed to me, and now I must confess to you. The judge has become the culprit. Alexander," and her voice was low, soft and fond, as for the first time she pronounced the name that was so dear to her, "they say that every family has a skeleton in its closet; my family is not an exception to the rule. We are now betrothed, and yet it may be many a long, weary day before we can stand by the altar, and exchange the vows which bind two lives in one."

Blackie listened in astonishment to the words, but as yet he could not comprehend their meaning.

Ernestine looked up wistfully in his face, as if to detect the impression her communication had made, but she only saw faith in the face, and love strong shining from the dark-brown eyes.

"Alexander, I have learned to love you, and yet my reason should have told my heart that the passion was an almost hopeless one," she continued, slowly and sadly.

"Hopeless!" he exclaimed, in astonishment.

"Yes, that is the word," she replied, with downcast eyes.

"I can not understand how that can be," he said, in wonder. "Are you not free to marry?"

"No," she replied, and she shook her head wearily as she spoke.

"Why, Ernestine, you speak in riddles!" he exclaimed. "I have heard your cousin, Elbert, speak a dozen times at least in regard to your marriage. He has often wondered and remarked that he thought it strange that you have always rejected your suitors."

"There are two reasons for that," she replied. "The first one is that until I met you, I never saw any one whom I fancied; and the second, the one that I have just told you. I am not free."

"But I do not understand you at all," he expostulated, puzzled. "You love me, Ernestine, do you not?"

"Yes," she murmured, inclining her head as she spoke until it rested on his arm.

"And loving me, do you not desire to be my wife?"

"Yes," again she murmured.

"And yet you say that there is a reason which forbids our marriage?"

"Yes," again the low tone, so full of quiet resignation.

"But explain this riddle!" he exclaimed.

"It is 'the skeleton in the closet.'"

"There is some family secret, then?"

"Yes."

"But Elbert does not know it?"

"No; I alone of all our family."

"But can you not explain to me the nature of this secret?" he asked.

"Yes; but it will be painful for me to speak, and painful for you to listen; that is, if you love me."

She spoke with deep feeling.

"But you do not doubt my love?" he exclaimed, quickly, bending his head and imprinting a kiss on her smooth forehead.

"No, I do not," she replied; "but perhaps it would have been better for us both if we had never met—never learned to love each other."

"Do not think that!" he rejoined, quickly; "it was our fate to meet and love; not many in this world escape their destiny, try how they may. But come, confide in me. Tell me all frankly and freely."

"I can not tell you all, for the secret concerns another besides myself."

"Another!" he exclaimed, in wonder.

"Yes; and until that other dies, I can never marry!" The girl uttered her words with mournful accent and deep dejection.

Blackie was thoroughly astonished at this avowal. It was clear to him that Elbert Van Tromp had no suspicion of this family secret.

"You are a gentleman," she continued, finding that he did not speak; "you would wish to be proud of the woman to whom you gave your name and the shelter of your arms."

"Yes," said Blackie, quickly, "as I would be justly proud of you, bright, beautiful girl that you are."

She shook her head sadly.

"Think, then, how terrible would be the shock if some day you should discover that a dreadful disgrace covered with its mantle of shame the woman whom you loved so well."

Blackie's face wore an expression of profound astonishment as he listened to her words. The trembling voice, the broken accent, and the averted face all betrayed how deep was the anguish of the girl.

"A disgrace attached to *you*?" he demanded, in wonder, almost unable to believe that he had heard correctly.

"Yes, to me," she murmured, "and at any moment the dreadful secret may be given to the world, and then shame is my portion forevermore."

"I cannot believe but that you are laboring under some terrible delusion!" Blackie exclaimed. "You cannot be sensible of what you are saying when you make such a dreadful statement."

"Oh, yes," was the sad reply; "I have revealed to you the bitter truth in all its terrible reality, so that you may see how hopeless is the chance that I may ever be your wife."

"But I cannot understand it; what has this nameless person to do with you?"

"That is the secret that I cannot explain," she replied, "for, as I have said, it concerns another. While that person lives I shall never marry, for I should lead a life of endless torment. You would want your wife to be happy, to greet you with smiles and loving looks, not with tears and inward reproaches; I should live in an agony of fear, lest the terrible secret should be discovered, and the shame which I alone ought to bear should also fall on you."

Mournful was the speech, yet the girl's manner was full of resignation to fate's stern decrees.

"Yet when the person you speak of dies, you will be free?"

"Yes; for the secret is only known to two beings in this world. If death should seal his lips, there would no longer be danger of discovery."

Blackie, though sorely puzzled, was not the man to be dismayed.

"Do not despair, Ernestine," he said, cheerfully; "time works wonders. We are both young; a day even may free you from the influence of this strange affair. We can never tell what the future will bring forth. Ernestine, I shall regard you as my plighted wife until, with your own lips, you bid me not to love you more."

"That will never be, I fear," she replied.

There was a violent ring at the door-bell, and startled by the sound, Ernestine sprang to her feet.

"A visitor," she said, as a servant entered the parlor, with the intelligence that Mr. O'Shane wished to see Mr. Blackie.

"Show him in here, Thomas," Ernestine ordered, and then, when the servant departed, extended her hand to Blackie, who clasped it warmly, and she left the room, passing O'Shane, who bowed gallantly to the fair young beauty, as he entered.

The Irishman closed the door carefully behind him. He was evidently in a state of considerable excitement, and Blackie looked at him in wonder.

"Whist, ye divil!" O'Shane exclaimed; "I've a message for ye."

"Yes? what is it?" Blackie asked, carelessly.

"Miss Rosaline Ameston, of Nashville, Tennessee, wishes to see ye at the Hoffman House."

CHAPTER XXII.

BETWEEN TWO FIRES.

BLACKIE stared at the Irishman in utter astonishment.

"What is that you say?" he exclaimed.

"Bad 'cess to me! don't I spake plain enough?" cried O'Shane, decidedly out of temper. "I say that Miss Rosaline Ameston, of Nashville, Tennessee, wishes to see ye, at the Hoffman House."

"Rosaline Ameston!" muttered Blackie, and an anxious expression came over his face.

"Yis; don't ye remember the lady?"

Blackie did not reply; his face clouded over, and he seemed lost in thought. O'Shane waited for a moment, and then spoke again:

"Is it deaf ye are, me jewel?"

"No, no," muttered Blackie; "I hear you well enough."

"Faix! the message don't seem to please ye much, judging by your face," protested the Irishman.

Blackie glanced for a moment at the excited face of O'Shane in an absent sort of way, and then commenced to pace up and down the room, his hands behind him and his brows knitted in deep thought. O'Shane lost patience.

"What the devil is the matter wid ye?" he finally exclaimed. "Do ye know the lady or don't ye? Are ye going to see her or not?"

"By what strange combination of circumstances does it happen that you are acquainted with Rosaline Ameston?" Blackie demanded, suddenly, pausing in his walk and facing the Irishman.

"Oh, I knew her a long time ago," was the man's rejoinder.

"But how did she know that you and I were acquainted?" Blackie evidently was in no mood for prevarication and mystery.

"How the devil could I tell that she knew you?" O'Shane answered, in indignation. "Faix! I happened to mention your name promiscuously, and she axed me if you were the Captain Alexander Blackie of a New York regiment, who was stationed at Nashville, Tennessee, for a time, during the war. Of course, I replied that I couldn't answer for that, and then she described you as purty and exact as if you had been standing to the fore all the time."

Blackie had listened attentively, and when the Irishman had finished, he cast a sidelong glance into

O'Shane's face; then he stroked his mustache, apparently deep in reflection.

O'Shane had noticed the look and was puzzled to account for it, but he assumed an innocent expression, drew down the corners of his mouth, and wrinkled his forehead in imitation of Blackie, as if he too was troubled with weighty thoughts.

Blackie, in a few moments, seemed to have made up his mind.

"O'Shane, there's trouble ahead."

"Sure, and that's what I was afraid of!" O'Shane replied, knowingly.

"And that trouble comes from a woman."

"That's been the cry ever since the days of Mother Eve!" The Irishman spoke emphatically. "Sorrah a bit of mischief there's been in this world but that a woman's been at the bottom of it."

"You might as well know the truth, O'Shane," Blackie said, thoughtfully. "The chances now are almost two to one that I shall not marry the heiress."

"That's big odds, me b'y, but it's many a time I've seen the dark horse win the race and the favorite 'way in the wake," O'Shane observed, reflectively. "Sure, I thought that it was a 'walk over' you'd have. Van Tromp said that the gurl was 'dead gone' on yees."

"Ah, it isn't the heiress that I'm to have trouble with," Blackie answered, with a doubtful shake of the head. "It's the other one."

"What has she got to do with the affair, at all, at all?" exclaimed O'Shane, pretending to be greatly astonished.

"You might as well know the whole truth," Blackie said, thoughtfully. "Don't you remember that when Van Tromp, on the night we three met in the Pavilion for the first time, asked me if I was free to marry, I replied that legally I was, though morally I was not?"

"Yis, to be sure I do."

"And, if you remember, I further explained that, just at the close of the war, I had been engaged to be married to a young girl in Nashville, Tennessee, but becoming involved in a brawl, I had been obliged to fly for my life, and that since that time I had never met the girl, although I had searched for her?"

"Yis, I remember."

"Well, that girl is this Rosaline Ameston."

"Bedad! that's ugly now, isn't it?"

"Yes, I fancy that it will be unpleasant."

"And just as you were getting along so nately wid the heiress! By the powers! it will be hard for ye to marry her now, and ye in love wid the other gurl, and it's a beauty she is, too!" the Irishman said, thoughtfully.

"No, no!" exclaimed Blackie, looking at the Irishman in astonishment. "You are laboring under a mistake. It is Ernestine that I am in love with, and not this other girl."

The Irishman gave utterance to a prolonged whistle. He was astounded at this intelligence.

"The devil ye say!" he exclaimed, breathlessly; "and ye are not in love with Rosaline?"

"No."

"Be gob! but ye said ye was."

"Yes; but when I said so I had not met Ernestine. I thought that I truly loved Rosaline; imagined, too, that the love was still in my heart and would never be supplanted by another passion; but, as I have said, I had not met this girl then. Since I have known her, little by little the old love has faded out and the new one has taken its place. Why, not twenty minutes ago, in this very room, Ernestine and I plighted our troth. And now, like a phantom in my path, rises the woman whom I thought I should never see again."

"Faix, I wouldn't see her, me jewel, at all," suggested O'Shane, who was at his wits' end to find a way out of the scrape.

Blackie shook his head.

"That course cannot be followed," he replied. "I know Rosaline of old. If I do not go to her, she will come to me."

"True for ye!" exclaimed the Irishman, impulsively.

"Ah! I see that you know something of her resolute will," Blackie said, a little astonished at the exclamation.

"Yis—of course—sure, one can see in her face that she's not a gurl to be trifled wid," the Irishman explained, just a little confused.

"She, naturally, will receive me as if there had only been a break of days in our love instead of years," Blackie continued. "You can easily judge how painful it will be for me to repulse the caresses of the woman who was once so dear to me, how terrible the task to tell her that I love her no longer, and that I am engaged to be married to another."

"Sure, she knows that already," blurted out O'Shane; and then hardly had the words passed his lips before he commenced to inwardly curse his own stupidity in speaking.

"She does know it?" Blackie exclaimed, in wonder. "Who told her? who knows anything about the affair, except us three?"

"Sure, it was me that told her, the blundering villain that I am!" cried O'Shane, pathetically. "Now call me a blockhead—a murdering thafe of the world—anything ye like! Kick me out of the house, if it plases ye; sure, I deserve it! I'm the biggest blaggard that ever lived!"

Serious as were the thoughts that were pressing upon Blackie's mind, he could not help smiling at the comical misery of the self-accusing Irishman.

"The mischief is done and words will not help it any," Blackie replied. "But tell me, how did it happen that I became the subject of conversation between you?"

"Sorrah a one of me can tell!" exclaimed O'Shane. "Your name came up some way. She gave a description of ye, and of course I said ye answered to it, and then I believe that she said something about Elbert Van Tromp sp'aking that his sister would be married soon, and I replied carelessly, ye know, that I believed you would be the happy man. Oh! bad 'cess to the wagging of me tongue! Faix! I would have thanked any jintleman to have taken me by the throte and choked me until I was black in the face jist thin, as I saw her face change and her eyes get as big as saucers."

"She seemed angry then when she heard that it was probable that I would marry Ernestine?" Blackie queried.

"Divil a word of a lie is there in it!" O'Shane rejoined, promptly. "Since I've got you into the

scrape wid my blundering, it's only right that I should make a clane breast of it."

"I'll go to her at once," Blackie's tones were decided.

"Oh, Blackie, me jewel, will ye ever forgive me for getting ye into the scrape? One woman is bad enough, but two at the same time is the devil!"

"Perhaps it is as well as it is. Your disclosure has broken the force of the blow. The sooner I see her the better. Anticipation of trouble is half the time worse than the actual trouble. Wait until I get my hat and coat. I will be down in a moment." Then Blackie left the parlor.

O'Shane chuckled quietly to himself. "Faix! and I got well out of that," he muttered; "divil a bigger blunder did I ever make in all my life. I wonder what the end will be? Bedad! it will be a nate ruction!"

CHAPTER XXIII. THE LOST LOVE.

INSIDE of five minutes Blackie returned, ready for the street, and he and O'Shane at once left the house.

As they descended the steps, O'Shane looked around him carefully. He was looking for the man in gray, but that individual was nowhere to be seen, and the Irishman felt correspondingly jubilant.

Blackie noticed this action of O'Shane, and inquired the cause, and that gentleman proceeded to relate his little adventure with the unknown, who had kept such constant watch upon him from the time he had left the hotel until he had entered the Van Tromp mansion.

Blackie rather wondered at the affair, but could offer no solution to the mystery.

The two walked rapidly down the avenue until they arrived at Thirtieth street; then they went through to Broadway. And as they joined the crowded throng, pressing along the busy street, O'Shane happened to glance behind him, and to his disgust and astonishment he saw the man in gray coming leisurely along the upper side of Thirtieth street.

"The dirty blaggard!" exclaimed O'Shane, suddenly, stopping short in his walk in disgust.

"What's the matter?" demanded Blackie, stopping also and wondering at the words of the Irishman.

"That devil in gray—the murdering villain!" O'Shane exclaimed, in a passion.

"What of him?"

"He's follering us—bad 'cess to him!"

O'Shane had taken his eyes from the man for a moment to speak to Blackie, and as he turned his gaze again to Thirtieth street to direct his companion where to look for the man who was evidently playing the spy upon them, to his utter astonishment no man in gray could be seen. O'Shane rubbed his eyes for a moment and then stared around, blinking like an owl brought suddenly into the glare of the light.

"Oh! Saint Patrick save us! but it's bewitched I am!" he cried, in amazement. "I'll take me oath I saw that villain coming along the street, and divil a hair is there of him there, now. Sure, I'm not drunk, for sorrah a sup have I taken this day but me coffee, and that don't go to a man's head."

"The explanation is simple enough," said Blackie; "the fellow probably saw that you had noticed him and took advantage of your taking your eyes from him a second to slip into some doorway."

"Let's go back and have him out, the dirty blaggard!" exclaimed O'Shane, in a rage, flourishing his light cane.

"What is the use of that?" Blackie inquired, in astonishment.

"Then we'll make him explain what he manes by follering us about as if we were two pickpockets, bad 'cess to him!"

"Suppose he denies that he was following us?" Blackie asked. "You forget, he denied that he was following you."

"Yis, but didn't I see him wid me own two eyes?" O'Shane demanded.

"What if you did? The streets are free to every one; besides, you have not committed any offense which renders you liable to the law, so the man is clearly not a police spy. What does it matter if he does follow you? Come along and never mind him."

"But it's disagreeable to have a dirty blaggard like that dogging a man's footsteps all the time! By me soul I'll murder that feller if he annoys me much longer!"

Then the two proceeded down the street until they reached the hotel.

"I'll take you up to her room right away," the Irishman said. "I know where it is and it's no use bothering the office."

Blackie consented and they proceeded up-stairs immediately.

Arriving at the door of Rosaline's room, O'Shane knocked. The clear voice of the girl bade him enter, and in a moment more the two men stood face to face with the diamond beauty.

She advanced to receive Blackie with outstretched hand, not a trace of embarrassment in her manner. O'Shane had watched her closely, expecting to see some traces of agitation as she met her old-time lover, but he was disappointed.

"And now, Miss Rosie, if you will have the kindness to excuse me, I'll be after l'aving ye alone wid Mr. Blackie. I have some important business to transact down-town. I shall be plased to call ap... ye this evening, for a while, if you are not engaged," O'Shane said, gallantly.

"Oh, yes, I shall always be at home to you, Mr. O'Shane," she replied, smilingly. "I am always glad to see my old friends."

Then O'Shane bowed himself out, mentally wondering how the affair would end and congratulating himself that he was not in Blackie's position.

"Sit down," the girl said, pushing a rocking chair toward Blackie, after the door had fairly closed behind O'Shane, "let me take your hat and overcoat. I give you fair warning that I expect you to pay me quite a visit. I'm not going to let you run away with a how-d'ye-do."

Blackie submitted with a good grace. Removing his overcoat he gave it with his hat into the hands of the young woman, then took the seat which she had proffered.

Rosaline sat down by the center-table and rested her arm upon the polished marble. Blackie, three paces off, could not help remarking how much she had improved in the few years that had passed since

they had met. The slender, fragile girl had been transformed into a stately, superb woman; time had rounded the glorious form and given a rare beauty to the winning face with its clear-cut outlines. Blackie, too, noticed with wonder the jewels which adorned her person; the diamonds in her ears alone were worth a mint of money. It was plain to him that fortune had dealt kindly with his old-time lover. It was not alone the changes in her person telling of fortune's favor and of time's perfecting hand which had attracted his attention, but there was an air of self-reliance—of command visible in the girl's face and in her graceful carriage which he could not remember of ever seeing there before.

And on her part, too, she had been mentally comparing the man who sat before her, cold and impassive, with the eager, reckless lover who once knelt at her feet, pressed warm kisses on her willing lips, and vowed himself her slave forever. To her eyes, Blackie had changed but little. His face was paler and thinner, but the dark eyes still shone with their old joyous light, and the careless, happy smile still played about the mouth.

"Well, how have you been since we last saw each other?" the girl asked, breaking the silence.

"I have lived," he replied, in the old-time careless way that she knew so well.

"And you mean by that, that, having lived, you have enjoyed your life," she said. "You were always of a happy disposition."

"And is not that the best way to meet the rude blows of the world?" he asked. "The man who laughs generally wins."

"And have you won?" she questioned, quickly.

"Yes; won a living," he replied, laughing.

"If one can judge from the fashion of your dress, you have won something more than a bare living," she said, pointedly.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, warningly; "take care! Do not question too sharply, or I may try that too. Fortune has not bestowed her gifts upon you with a niggardly hand, if one may judge from the diamonds you wear. Why, Rosaline, an Indian princess from the far-off East could not boast richer jewels; they fairly dazzle one's eyes."

"There was a time, Alex, when you declared that you could not look at me because your eyes were dazzled, and I wore no diamonds then," she said, meaningly.

"Yes," and a low sigh came from Blackie's lips, and yet it was hardly a sigh, more like a long-drawn breath; his eyes, too, wandered restlessly to the floor.

The cool, clear eyes of the girl watched the face of the man. It was evident that she was more master of her feelings than he of his.

"Alex, how do I look?" she asked, suddenly, and she rested her forehead in her hand, the arm of which was supported by the table, and gazed at him in a peculiar, dreamy way from under her long, dark eyelashes.

"More beautiful than ever," he replied, slowly, raising his gaze to her face as he spoke.

"And in the face of the woman of twenty-four do you discover any traces of the girl of seventeen who, like a little stupid goose, thought there was only one man in the world, and that his name was Alexander Blackie, a gallant captain, so dashing and so handsome in his blue uniform?" she asked, a smile upon her face, and yet Blackie could plainly see that there was but little mirth in the girl's heart.

"Oh, yes; I should have recognized you anywhere had we met," he responded, affecting not to notice the pointed allusion to the old-time intimacy so apparent in her speech.

"Is it possible?"

"Yes; only that time has improved you greatly. The rosebud has bloomed into the perfect flower."

"How familiar that sounds!" she exclaimed; "you used to make just such pretty speeches before. I was a young and foolish girl then; and when you said that you loved me, I believed it."

CHAPTER XXIV.

A LOVING VENGEANCE.

QUITE a long silence followed Rosaline's speech. The words had been spoken lightly enough, but there was a sting in her tone that reached Blackie's heart. The struggle was near at hand, and the instinct of the man told him it would be a painful one.

"Young girls are so silly, you know," she said, finding that he did not speak.

"Rosaline, you are reproaching me," he protested, gravely.

"Reproaching you! Why should I reproach you?" There was a bitter meaning in the simple question.

"Because you think that I have wronged you," he replied.

"Why, how could you wrong me?" and her lips curled as she put the question.

"By proving unfaithful to the vows I swore."

"And that was about seven years ago," she said, thoughtfully. "Seven years is a very long time for love to last. I do not expect miracles in this world. You forgot me before seven months were gone, and now I do not expect you to remember after seven years."

"Forgot you after seven months!" he cried, in wonder; "why, Rosaline, you wrong me, upon my soul you do! It was many a long year before your image faded from my heart—before I gave you up as one lost to me forever."

"Alex, in the old time I believed you, and now I am ashamed to learn that the man whom I once loved has fallen so low as to hide himself behind a falsehood!" exclaimed the girl, indignantly, and she rose from her seat and walked to the further end of the room, her face full of angry passion, and her little hands clenched tightly together.

Blackie did not reply, although his cheeks had flushed and his temple had burned when the bitter words of the incensed woman had fallen upon his ears.

And then, annoyed that she let anger master her, Rosaline came slowly back and stood by the side of the table, looking, with a face white as the marble upon which her hand rested, upon Blackie.

"You are very bitter against me, Rosaline," he said.

"Have I not reason to be?"

"No," Blackie replied, firmly.

"Why did you not answer my letters?" she demanded.

"Your letters!" Blackie betrayed utter astonishment. "I never received one."

"Never received one! I wrote you five, if I wrote you one."

"And where did you direct them?"

"To the place you told me in your letter—San Antonio, Texas."

"Rosaline, as I hope for mercy hereafter, I declare to you that I never received a single line from you. And the instant I dared to venture, I came to Nashville after you, but no trace could I find. You had disappeared."

She looked at him for a moment with her clear eyes, and he bore her gaze undauntedly.

"There is truth in your face," she said, and then the proud spirit of the woman seemed to vanish, and all the love which she had ever had for Alex Blackie came back with redoubled force.

A moment she looked at him with outstretched hands, and then, sinking on her knees before him, she seized one of his hands and covered it with kisses.

Only for a single second Blackie gazed at the kneeling form of the woman whom he had once loved so well, and then, springing impulsively to his feet, he raised her in his arms and folded her gently to his breast. And though he held the quivering form of the lovely girl within his arms, although he fancied that he could hear the beating of her heart against his own, yet in his face there was no flush of joy, but only a look of sad resignation.

"Oh, Alex, you have made me so happy," she murmured.

"Made you happy?"

"Yes; do I not feel the pressure of your arms around me—does not that tell me that once again you love me?" she said, slowly.

"Rosaline, I do love you," he replied, in a voice hardly above a whisper, "but not as you would be loved. It is a brother's love, not a husband's that I offer you."

With a wild expression in her eyes she looked up into his face, but she did not retreat from him.

"Oh, I know all, Alex; you are going to sell yourself to Ernestine Van Tromp. For the sake of her money you will forget the woman who for your sake would give up every thing in the world," she exclaimed, impetuously.

"And to the girl of whom you speak I have pledged my word."

"The word you gave to me was freely given years before you ever saw this girl!" she cried, imperiously.

"Oh, Alex, you make me ashamed of you when I think that for the sake of a little money you will sell yourself to a woman for whom you do not care."

Blackie bit his lip, not because of the words which he had just heard, but for the words which now he was forced to speak.

"You think that for the sake of this girl's money I marry her?"

"Yes; I know all the details of the plot," she replied, quickly. "But I can save you from a share in this disgraceful scheme. Ready money I have but little of, but my diamonds are worth ten thousand dollars, at the least. Any diamond broker on Broadway will give you that for them. Take them freely. If each diamond was a drop of my heart's blood, I would not hesitate to make the gift!"

Impatiently—with almost feverish heat—the girl snatched the glittering gems from their places in her ears, tore the cross from her bosom, and extended them in the hollow of her hand to Blackie, and he, with folded arms, and a sad smile upon his face, stood motionless, and looked upon the wondrously beautiful woman.

"Take them!" she exclaimed, imploringly.

"I cannot," he replied, shaking his head.

"Why not?" she demanded, in wonder.

"I am very poor, Rosaline—a man, too, who is an outcast, and cannot pretend to the manly graces of a gentleman; and yet, Rosaline, vagabond as I am, I should feel degraded in accepting any thing from you."

"A man can not be disgraced by accepting aid from the woman who loves him!" cried Rosaline, impulsively.

"Rosaline, you force me to speak words which must give you terrible agony," he said, evidently deeply agitated.

She looked for a moment into his face, and then, thrusting the diamonds carelessly into her pocket as if they had been common pebbles instead of precious stones, she advanced to him and laid her head down upon his breast.

"Put your arms around me," she said, quietly; "I can bear cruel words better if I am safe locked in your embrace."

He obeyed.

Again she clung to him with all the trust of loving woman.

"Now speak," she said: "remember that I, too, am like you—a child of the world, though now tricked out in the silks and laces of a fine lady."

"Rosaline, I would rather you should think me the fickle, uncertain man that I am, rather than a vile one." Deep emotion was evident in his voice. "I have not sold myself for money. At first I looked upon the scheme more in the light of a frolic than any thing else, but after I had been a week in the house with this girl, seeing her daily, almost hourly, despite myself I grew to love her."

The rounded form imprisoned within his arm shivered just a little, and that was all.

"And now, Rosaline," he continued, "I admit my pledge to you, and, if you claim the fulfillment, I will do all in my power to crush the new love which has grown up in my heart and revive into live coals the dead embers of the old."

For fully five minutes the girl replied not; she remained motionless as a statue; but that Blackie could feel the convulsive movement of the breast pressed so closely against his own, he would have believed that the girl had fainted.

At last, with a sigh, she raised her head. A single, long, lingering look, full of tenderness, she gave into Blackie's face, and then, freeing herself from his arms, she took his two hands in hers.

"And do you think that I could be happy with you, knowing that the image of another filled your heart? Oh, no! I want all your heart or none. I will show you how true, how great my love is by giving you back your pledge. You are free—free to marry whom you like. Oh, Alex!" and a look of anguish came over her fair face, and she pressed his hands violently. "You don't know how hard it is

for me to give you up to another woman! But, now go; good-by!"

And then, with a sudden motion, she threw herself on his neck and imprinted a soft kiss upon his cheek.

"Do not forget me too soon," she murmured, in a voice full of tremulous agony.

Blackie felt that to prolong the parting would be but to add to her suffering. A single kiss he pressed upon her full red lips, and then, seizing his overcoat and hat, he rushed from the room.

CHAPTER XXV.

ROSALINE'S SECRET.

Just about seven o'clock that evening O'Shane paid his promised visit to Rosaline.

The Irishman had not seen Blackie since his interview with the girl, and he was anxious to learn the result. Upon entering the room he judged at once from the serious expression upon the girl's face that something had occurred.

"Well, Rosie, dear, did ye have a pleasant chat wid the b'y?" O'Shane asked, seating himself unceremoniously in the rocking-chair and stretching out his long legs.

"Oh, yes," she replied, in a quiet, absent sort of way.

"And did ye part good friends?" There was quite an anxious tone in the Irishman's voice as he put the question.

The girl's proud lips curled in contempt; her quick ear had caught the tone, and she readily guessed the cause of O'Shane's anxiety.

"Yes, we parted good friends," she replied. "Do not be alarmed; he will marry the heiress, and you will get your hundred dollars. If by simply lifting up my finger I could stop the marriage I would not do it."

"Oh! to the devil I'd pitch the dirty money!" exclaimed the Irishman, in supreme contempt. "I only axed for information. But, I say, Rosie, it's changed your mind ye have. Bedad, ye said before that you wouldn't give Blackie up."

"Did I?" said the girl, absently.

"Of course you did."

"I've changed my mind then."

"And what's the reason?"

"A woman never has any reason," was the half-contemptuous response. "Haven't you lived long enough in the world to know that? We are simply creatures of impulse, and act on the spur of the moment."

"Yis, Rosie; but you are not a woman, ye know; it's an angel ye are," said the Irishman, gallantly.

Rosaline's only reply to the compliment was a scornful smile. She cared little for empty lip-service.

"I'm glad, though, that ye have made up your mind not to stand in the way of the wild devil's fortune," he said, reflectively. "Maybe, after he's married, he'll turn over a new lafe and become a dacent jintleman."

"I hope so," she remarked, dryly.

"Well, it's glad I am, any way. But, I say, Rosie, sure you've got another lover, and ye don't need Blackie at all."

"I suppose you mean Mr. Van Tromp?"

"Yis; it's a foine young man he is now."

"Very rich, too, isn't he?" was asked, carelessly.

The Irishman caressed his glossy side-whiskers for a moment, apparently perplexed by the question.

"Sure, Rosie, I'll not deceive ye in the last!" he blurted out suddenly. "Divil a rap is Van Tromp worth. It's his cousin, the gurl that Blackie is to marry, that's got all the money."

"I had a suspicion that he was not wealthy," she said, quietly. "To do him justice, he has never openly spoke of his wealth, but he has spoken in such a way as to lead one not acquainted with his affairs to believe that he was very well off."

"And now, me jewel, see what a friend I am to ye!" exclaimed O'Shane, pathetically, "for I'm going to tell you all about Mr. Van Tromp's little game—in regard to you."

"Oh, he has made you his confidant, then?"

"Sure we're as thick as thieves!" protested O'Shane.

"As thieves?" and the girl laughed.

"Bad 'cess to me tongue!" cried O'Shane, in mock rage; "sure, I never open me mouth but I make a blunder."

"But, go on; tell me about this Mr. Van Tromp."

"Yis; well, then, he has been told that you are a wealthy heiress wid loads of money, and his idea is to marry you so as to help you take care of your fortune."

The girl smiled and appeared to be meditating over the information, but she did not seem in the least annoyed.

"See what I've saved you from, now!" O'Shane exclaimed, triumphantly. "Faix, ye might have married the deluding villain, thinking that he had a gold-mine to the fore."

"Oh, no," the girl rejoined, smilingly; "you are wrong there. I never had any intention of marrying Mr. Van Tromp, even if I had known him to be a millionaire. You ought to know the reason well enough. While a certain man lives on this earth I cannot marry."

"I don't see why that should keep ye single," the Irishman urged, thoughtfully. "Sure, he dasn't show his face openly. He couldn't say anything ag'in' it, for, if he did, back he would go to where he was before. Bedad, I think that the law has freed you from his control intirely."

"The law may have done so, but my own heart hasn't," the young woman replied.

"And would you care a rap whether he liked it or not?" the Irishman demanded, in astonishment.

"Yes," she answered, firmly.

"Sure it's a quare craytur ye are, I'll go bail for that!" O'Shane exclaimed, evidently astonished.

"But, I say, Rosie, it's a riddle ye are, anyway."

"A riddle? I don't understand you now."

"I'll explain; ye was a wild-cat, like, in your excitement awhile ago, when, like the blunderhead that I am, I let out that Blackie was to marry the heiress. Sure ye wanted to marry him yourself, and now ye say that while a certain blagg'ard lives ye won't and can't marry anybody. That's what I call a riddle now." And the Irishman leaned back in his chair, caressed his chin and smiled beamingly.

"The explanation is easy," she replied, quietly. "For Blackie's sake, the man whom I really and truly loved, I would have dared everything, open

shame—the world's contempt—all, I would have braved for him. He, like myself, has been a football for fortune; has oftener felt the world's blows than its caresses; has seen more clouds than sunshine. I would have told him all, and in the shelter of his arms forgotten the misery that this unhappy man has cast ever upon my life; but, with Elbert Van Tromp see how different the case would be! He comes of an old New York family, and is as proud of his race and blood as a Spanish grandee. Think how he would have received the news that the loving and tender girl whom he had married was only—"

"Don't, Rosie—don't spake any more about it, me jewel!" cried O'Shane, quickly interrupting her.

"Faix! when I look at ye, hear ye say such terrible things, and see yer eyes blaze and yer cheek whiten, it makes the blood run cold in me veins. Why the devil is it that a girl like ye, that's fit to be the wife of a prince or a king, maybe, should suffer the way ye have? Oh, Rosie, colleen, if I was only tin years younger and ye was tin years older, bedad, I'd make ye Mrs. Gorman O'Shane in a twinkling, provided that it was agreeable to ye!"

"Be content to be my friend, for you cannot grow younger, although I can grow older," she said, extending her hand, the charming smile, which was so winning in its power, upon her face.

O'Shane took the slender white hand and kissed the fingers reverently.

"And now, Rosie, will ye tell me one thing?" he plead, in the persuasive, humble way so natural to him, gently stroking the slender fingers with his own tawny ones.

"What is it?" she asked. "I must know that first."

"Now don't be angry with me, but why is it, Rosie, dear, that ye let Blackie go?"

The girl remained silent for a few moments, apparently considering the question. At last she lifted her gaze from the floor to O'Shane's face and made reply:

"Why should I spoil his brilliant match with this wealthy girl because some years ago he was tender and I was foolish?" She spoke slowly but decidedly, and without a trace of agitation in her manner. Little wonder that the keen-witted man of the world was deceived. Though an adventurer, whose motto was "Each for himself and Satan for us all," yet he had seen in the course of his lifetime too many changes of fortune produced by love's strange caprices to doubt the existence of the passion. She had not seen Blackie for years, and thought she still loved him; they met, and she discovered that the old-time "glamour" was wanting, and so readily resigned him.

"Faix!" exclaimed O'Shane, in admiration, "you're one woman picked out of tin thousand! But, Rosie, me jewel, I must bid you good-by, for it's up-town I'm going," and, as he spoke, he rose to his feet. A sudden thought occurred to him. "Oh, by the way, Rosie, I forgot to ask ye," and then he lowered his voice mysteriously, "have ye seen any thing of that thafe of the world—ye know who I mane?"

The girl shook her head.

"I s'pose ye know that he escaped the other day?"

"Yes; I read the particulars in the newspaper."

"P'haps he manes to keep away and not bother you?" O'Shane suggested, thoughtfully.

"Oh, no," the girl said, sadly and thoughtfully; "the moment he gets into trouble he will send for me to get him out of it."

"And will you do it?" the Irishman asked, curiously.

"Yes," was the firm response.

"And do ye love him still?"

"I owe him obedience, and while he lives I shall never forget nor neglect my duty," she answered, evading the question.

"Bedad, it will bring ye near the gallows one of these days!" O'Shane exclaimed.

"The shadow of the rope may fall upon me, and yet I shall not shrink."

Then O'Shane departed, and Rosaline was left alone.

CHAPTER XXVI.

AT LAST.

O'SHANE proceeded down-stairs into the street in quite a happy frame of mind. His step was lighter and more elastic than usual, and he switched the light cane in a very complacent manner against the leg of his pantaloons.

"By the powers, it's lucky I am!" he ejaculated, as he emerged from the hotel and halted for a moment upon the steps. "Sure, I feel as certain of that hundred dollars as if I held it now in me fist. It's nate and aisily earned, too. I thought that all the fat was in the fire, though, when she sent for Blackie."

As O'Shane walked on, sprightly and joyful, his hat set jauntily on one side of his head, as usual, his light cane tapping a tattoo on the pavement, and not an unpleasant thought in his mind, he happened to glance carelessly at a jeweler's window. As he turned his head for that purpose, his eyes, wandering a little to the rear, fell upon the well-known features of the man in gray, who was following him up the street, close at his heels.

O'Shane turned his head about to the front again as if he had been shot, and involuntarily his steps quickened; his hand clenched the cane and the scarlet hue of rage and astonishment came over his face.

"The dirty blagg'ard!" O'Shane muttered, in anger; "it's follerin' me ag'in he is. Bedad, I'll lade him over the town, bad 'cess to him!"

The angry Irishman stretched out his long legs and went on at a pace wick attracted considerable attention from the passers-by.

For about four blocks O'Shane proceeded at a rate which would have won the heart of a professional trainer of a champion walker; then he ventured to look behind him, and to his utter astonishment, discovered that the man in gray was nowhere to be seen.

O'Shane stopped short when he made this discovery, and turning about, looked down the street, expecting to see the spy somewhere in the throng; but his search was fruitless; the man in gray had disappeared.

"It's walked away from the thafe of the world I have!" he ejaculated, in delight. "Faix! it wasn't for nothing I was born wid two legs. A grayhound's

a fool to me. It's walking for the champion's belt that I'll be, next."

And falling again into his easy, semi-military stride, O'Shane went on up the street. As it was quite early in the evening, the thought occurred that it would be a good idea to call upon Elbert Van Tromp, as the chance was good to intercept him before he went out for the evening. So O'Shane turned down one of the cross-streets leading to Madison avenue, and reaching it, proceeded directly to the residence of the Van Tromps.

Ring the bell, he was admitted; but watchful eyes had seen him ascend the steps and enter the house.

The man in gray, Campbell, the Virginia colonel, on the opposite side of the street, concealed in the dark shadow cast by the houses, had kept a wary eye upon the Irishman, whom he had diligently followed from the time he had quitted the Hoffman House until the portals of the Madison avenue mansion had opened to receive him.

But Campbell had grown wise by experience. Detected once by the Irishman spying upon him, he had not been so careless in his tracking operations a second time. So that, when on Broadway, he had perceived from O'Shane's manner that he was aware of being watched, Campbell had instantly crossed over to the other side of the street, and there, secure from observation, had tracked O'Shane as the bloodhound tracks the fugitive Maroon in the West Indian jungle.

Campbell, concealed in the shadows of a doorway opposite the Van Tromp mansion, fell into a brown study.

"Twice I have tracked this man from this woman's hotel to this house," he muttered. "He doesn't live there, that is evident. He is an adventurer—a card-sharper, or something of that sort; I knew the tribe well enough in the old days in Virginia. Now let me sum up the case as a lawyer would sum it up—no, that's a bad simile. Rather let me say as the backwoods avenger—some Boone or Kenton of early days—would detect from the marks on the grassy meadow, or in the slime of the dank morass, whether that path led to the wigwags of the murdering red-skin or to the forest cabin of the white settler. First, this woman is a living image of John Blaine. I am sure that, in some way, she is connected with him—that she is in communication with him. Now to find the messenger. This tall Irishman is the only one who has visited her that answers to my idea of the man who would bear a message from the beauty with her diamonds to the escaped felon with the smell of Sing-Sing still fresh upon him. Then, too, why is the Irishman so enraged when he discovers that he is being followed? An honest man does not fear, even if a detective is at his heels. But what does the Irishman come to this house for?"

Long and earnestly Campbell meditated over this difficult question. His imagination could not supply an answer.

And while he leaned against the edge of the wall, his eyes wandering vacantly over the front of the house opposite, nearly every window of which was brilliantly illuminated by the gas burning within, the front door opened suddenly, and again as suddenly closed. No sound reached the ears of the watcher on the other side of the street, so carefully had the door been opened and shut; and, but for the ray of light which shot out upon the brown-stone steps, intercepted for a moment only by a dark figure passing through the portal, then again appearing for a second, and then disappearing as the door closed behind the figure, the Virginian would have rubbed his eyes in astonishment and wondered where the man had come from who descended the steps into the street.

The stranger walked with a peculiar, noiseless step, as though he was shod with velvet. Not a sound broke on the stillness of the night air as he walked onward, going down the avenue.

The Virginian passed his hand vacantly across his forehead; to his fevered imagination, almost crazed by dwelling upon one subject so intently, the man who glided along so noiselessly on the frosty pavement seemed more like a shadow from the other world than a mortal like himself.

The extraordinary caution, too, evinced in the opening and closing of the door, and the descent of the man to the street, bewildered the spy.

His first impulse was that the man was some sneak-thief who had, in some way, gained access to the house and was now departing with his booty; yet this surmise was soon disposed of, when the colonel reflected that the man was proceeding along very leisurely, as if not at all in a hurry, and, besides being apparently excellently attired—this was the colonel's impression, though the night was dark and the light dim; and, too, the man hadn't eloped with the overcoats in the hall, for he showed no signs of plunder.

The colonel was bewildered; he saw at the first glance that the man was not O'Shane; he was not as tall by half a head. The mysterious manner in which he had quitted the house aroused the liveliest suspicions, and as the stranger went on down the avenue, the colonel watched him, carefully noting the peculiarities of his walk. Little by little the impression came to the mind of the Virginian that the man was no stranger to him. He did not recognize the figure, but there was a peculiarity about that step and gait which led the colonel to believe that, somewhere and at some time, he had known a man who walked as this man walked.

Vaguely speculating upon the strangeness of the fact that he should remember a man's walk while both face and form had been forgotten, the colonel like one in a maze, leaned against the side of the doorway, his eyes still fixed upon the dark figure upon the other side of the street.

Then the man passed under the glare of a gas-lamp. He was not so far distant but that the colonel could see that his hair was light and that he had the appearance of a gentleman.

And, as the man passed under the light, he turned his head and cast a rapid glance behind him. 'Twas but for a moment, and though he was so far off that the colonel could barely catch a glimpse of his face, yet the Virginian would have sworn that he had heard him laugh mockingly—saw the white teeth glisten and the dark eyes shine.

A second only; and then, out from the circle of light into the darkness beyond went the man.

A second only did the eyes of the Virginian, con-

cealed in the shelter of the doorway, rest upon the face of the stranger, but that was quite enough.

Despite the light mustache that now shaded the upper lip, despite the flaxen locks which curled down from under the edges of the dark felt hat the stranger wore, and the thick scarf which muffled his throat and chin, the human bloodhound recognized his prey!

A minute more, his hand on the "bowie" concealed in his bosom, and his heart white as his face with rage, Campbell followed on the stranger's track.

CHAPTER XXVII. CHOCOLATE CONFESSES.

AGREEABLY to their appointment, Stewart and Weathers called upon the two girls.

As usual, Mary was busy engaged with her sewing in the inner room, while Chocolate, with one of the weekly story papers, was amusing herself in the little kitchen.

Chocolate admitted the young men.

"Mary's hard at work," she said, after the usual greetings were exchanged, "and the shirts are perfectly splendid."

"Don't disturb yourself," Stewart exclaimed, as he perceived that Mary was about to lay aside her work, and he advanced into the little parlor as he spoke; "keep on with your work and never mind me." Then he took a chair and sat down by her side, first removing his overcoat.

Weathers had remained in the kitchen with Chocolate.

"Won't you take off your overcoat and make yourself at home?" Chocolate asked, perceiving that Weathers still kept his overcoat buttoned up.

Then Weathers grinned good-naturedly at the girl, whereupon she made a face at him, and he unfastened the coat, and as he did so a lively black and tan terrier, about the same size as the famous cat, Peter, dropped to the ground. The animal shook himself vigorously, and then looked up into the girl's face and wagged his rat-like tail in token of amity.

Just a single look Chocolate gave at the bright, handsome little dog, so delicate in his proportions and so full of life and spirit, and then she set up a shout:

"Oh, you dear, good fellow, you. You're so kind and he's such a beauty!"

Then Weathers saw something in the girl's face that he had never seen there before; he was prompt to act. With a comical look he gently pulled the girl to him and folded her to his breast, putting the overcoat over her—not difficult to do, for Chocolate was slight in figure, and the overcoat was large in its proportions. She submitted quietly, but with a shy look, half-smile, half-blush, upon her face.

Then Weathers bent down his head to a level with her cheek—her head only came to his shoulder—and quickly said:

"Ain't you willing to pay me for the puppy?"

The sharp eyes of the girl looked him for a moment straight in the face as if she wished to read there what his intentions were. Weathers's honest eyes returned the gaze with so much respectful love in them that the warm blood tinged the girl's cheeks and forehead, and her eyes shyly hid themselves beneath their white lids.

"May I—?" asked Weathers, honestly and bluntly, and he put his hand under the chin and slowly tilted the little head back till the ripe, red lips of the little, lively Chocolate lay upturned to receive his kiss. She made no resistance, and by the act, plainer than words, confessed her love.

Only a single kiss Weathers imprinted upon the little mouth, and then the girl's head nestled down upon his breast in happy contentment.

Weathers felt that the prize he had toiled to win was won; the little, sprightly girl whose slender form he held so tightly in his arms was all his own.

Then over his soul came the pride of the conqueror. No dainty belle of fashion's giddy world had gained, whose lips had given and received a hundred love kisses bestowed by as many different lovers who had been "engaged" so many times, and so many times had snapped the silken bonds, that to be off with the old love and on with the new had become as commonplace as the changing of partners in a ball-room; whose heart had mirrored so many images that that subtle "camera" of the soul no longer acted with clearness, and the picture produced was shadowy in outline and uncertain in feature. Like the Genoese, Columbus, his bark had voyaged over an uncertain sea on discovery bent, but now the darkness of doubt was past and a fresh young heart owned him as its discoverer and lord.

Standing as the two were by the door that led into the entry, they were out of sight of Stewart and Mary, who were seated in the other room, busy in conversation.

How long the lovers would have remained motionless in their dream of love it is impossible to say, but a sudden commotion in the room rather abruptly brought them down from cloudland to earth again.

The terrier, who answered to the name of Prince, busily engaged in examining his new quarters after the fashion of his race, came upon the cat, Peter, fast asleep extended at full length behind the stove.

A single instant the terrier glared upon the cat enjoying her slumbers so peacefully and dreaming not that danger was nigh, then his tail became rigid in its stiffness, his ears stood upright, and every muscle in his wiry frame swelled beneath the shining hide. With a quick, sharp bark uttered as a war-cry, he pounced upon Peter. Happening to seize the unsuspecting cat by the loose skin of the neck, he "yanked" Peter out into the middle of the room before the astonished feline had any idea what the matter was. But, in the center of the room the dog released its hold for a moment for the purpose of getting a better grip; then came a transformation. The cat's tail became of wondrous size, his back arched like the gateway of a Moorish Temple, and as the terrier dashed in again to the attack, Peter received him with claws and teeth. So warm was the reception that the dog first yelped with pain and then howled with rage, but he came of good stock, did that black and tan, and was warranted "to come again." In a twinkling, despite Peter's claws or teeth, he had the cat over on his back, and for about a minute there was the liveliest little skirmish that was ever seen in that house.

Chocolate, with a succession of screams, took refuge on a chair, while Weathers made a desper-

ate attempt to separate the enraged animals. This was a task not easy to accomplish, for all the fighting blood of the terrier was up, and Pete was not a bit less averse to "trying conclusions," smarting as he was under the pain of half a dozen sharp bites.

Finally, Weathers getting the dog by the tail, dragged him away, the little animal snarling frightfully and kicking up row enough for a dog six times his size.

Peter, the moment he was relieved of the dog, immediately took refuge on the mantelpiece, and there, calmly licking the wounds he had received, quietly contemplated the enraged terrier who galloped up and down on the floor underneath barking furiously.

Weathers, catching up a towel which lay handy, drove the dog under the table and compelled him to give over his warlike designs, and then the dog, following the cat's example, turned his attention to the scratches and bites which he had received, relieving his mind, however, with an occasional growl, as much as to intimate that he yielded only to superior force, and stood ready to renew the quarrel at any moment.

Stewart and Mary had been attracted from the parlor by the disturbance, but after it was over retired again to their former position.

Chocolate and Weathers sat down by the table in the kitchen; Weathers rather disconsolate as he thought of the affray of which he had been the innocent cause.

The girl with her quick wit guessed his thoughts at once.

"Never mind," she said, soothingly; "it wasn't your fault. Of course you couldn't tell that they would fight. And if you hadn't brought the puppy, perhaps I shouldn't have known that you cared so much for me."

Weathers brightened up at this idea; it was quite consoling.

"Well, I never thought anything about their fighting, but I suppose that I had better take the dog away again, hadn't I?"

"Yes; for they will never get along together, and I do like Peter; I've had him since he was a little bit of a kitten. You won't be offended, will you, because I like Peter better than I do the little puppy?" and the girl looked into his face with quite a serious expression upon her features as she spoke.

"Why, of course not!" he exclaimed, and then turning the conversation he asked, "How do the shirts get on?"

"Oh, they are really beautiful!" Chocolate exclaimed, enthusiastically. "Mary is such a nice sewer."

"Mary's a nice girl, too."

"Yes, that she is."

"Do you know I think that my friend thinks a good deal of Mary?" Weathers said, meaningly.

"Yes, I know he does; I bother Mary about him."

"I don't think they will ever marry, though," Weathers said, musingly.

"Why not?" Chocolate demanded, in astonishment.

"Because she won't have him; she says that she is not worthy of him. Do you know any reason why she shouldn't marry him?" he asked, shrewdly.

"No," replied the girl, promptly; "there isn't any reason except that he is rich and she isn't. Mary has got a great deal of pride, and if she won't have him that's the reason."

"I wish you would find out," Weathers said, persistently.

"I will, and I'll tell you sure the next time you come, but I know that's the reason."

As usual, about ten o'clock the young men departed. The interview between Mary and Stewart was but a repetition of their former one. The girl had simply said that there was a powerful reason which forbade their union, but would not reveal what it was.

They bid the girls good-night and departed. Weathers put the terrier inside his overcoat as before, but the animal insisted upon keeping its head out, and, as Weathers retreated backward through the door, the dog took a parting look at the cat, which was still perched securely upon the mantelpiece. The mouth of the redoubtable terrier opened with a growl, displaying a fine set of white teeth, while the cat erected his back and swelled out his tail in war's stern array.

Weathers departed speedily for fear of another conflict.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

IN PURSUIT.

WITH the fires of rage swelling in every vein, the Virginian followed upon the track of the man who had emerged so cautiously from the Van Tromp mansion, and who was now proceeding down the avenue, totally unconscious that danger was near.

The fingers of the colonel gripped the handle of the bowie-knife, concealed within his vest, with a grasp of steel.

Steadily, step by step, he gained upon the man walking so carelessly onward. The impulse in his heart was to come close to the stranger, and then, with a sudden bound, and a slash of the "bowie," to forever end the deadly feud.

The breath came fast and hard between the colonel's firm-set teeth. His heart beat so loud that he feared the sound would come to the ears of his destined prey, and thus warn him of the peril which menaced his life.

But then even as the colonel's hand, withdrawn from the concealment of his clothing, flashed the bright blade of the knife in the air, and the dim rays of light which struggled through the murky atmosphere glittered on the surface of the shining steel, there came to him the thought of a hand-to-hand conflict under the cover of the night some years before. He remembered how, steel in hand and murder in his heart, he had leaped upon his foe, but the strong right hand of the assailed man had dashed aside the thrust of the knife aimed to take his life, and then had come the grapple, wherein two strong men contended, muscle against muscle, for the mastery. He remembered how by a sudden twist and a dextrous touch of the foot, he had been swung from his firm foothold and hurled prostrate on the pavement, and then the knife which he had raised to strike another entered his own breast. The thought, too, came to him that it would be almost impossible to get within striking distance of the man, whose death he sought, without alarming him.

Keenly on the watch, and suspecting that a foe lurked in each dark shadow, the haunted man would be certain to hear the stealthy footsteps approach him from the rear, and then, alarmed, he would either run like the grayhound, or else turn and fight with the desperation of the stag at bay. And if he adopted the latter course and was armed, as the chances were ten to one he was, the Virginian felt that he might sacrifice his own life and yet not take full measure of revenge upon his foe.

With a mighty effort the colonel calmed the torrent of rage surging from heart to brain, unloosed the iron gripe upon the handle of the knife, and returned it to its hiding-place.

"No," he muttered, half-aloud, "I'll take no

craft;" he was providing against man's keenest skill; he had not dreamed that his daring plan, framed to baffle the wits of the detective officers, would be set at naught by a strange chain of circumstances; fortune oftentimes mocks at skill and courage, and bestows her favors with an unsparing hand upon the fool who can boast of neither.

The man went on with a light and careless step, and ever and anon a smile would appear upon his face as he reflected how well his plans had succeeded, and how completely he had baffled the keen-scented hounds of the law, who had once been so close upon him. He hardly looked around, so confident was he that no peril threatened him. Once only, as he turned from the avenue into Twenty-third street, he

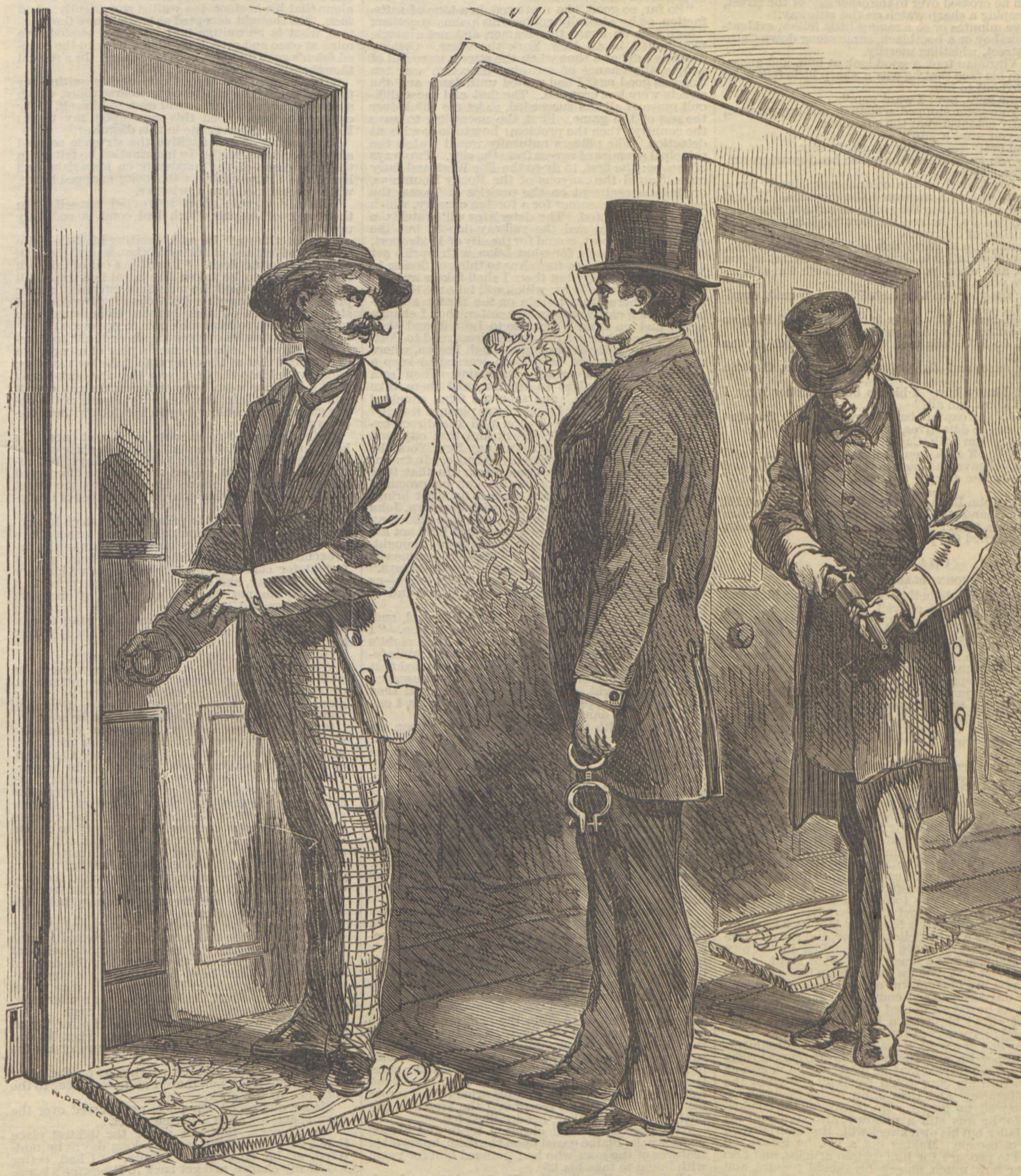
Bowery, where the presence of the shrewd-eyed detectives, in plain clothes, might be expected.

As steadfast as his shadow the Virginian had followed on the track of the fugitive, and so careful had the spy been in his movements that his watch had not even been suspected.

Along the river front to Catherine street the disguised man went; then crossed the street and went through a gateway leading to one of the docks.

Glancing up as he followed him, the Virginian read that the steamer "Bridgeport" would leave for Bridgeport at twelve, midnight.

The teeth of the colonel came together with a fierce snap as his eyes read the sign. The chase was done and the prey run to earth at last.



AND THEN THE THREE STOOD BY THE DOOR, LANE'S HAND UPON THE KNOB.—Page 7.

chances this time, but get 'dead wood on him,' sure. If he's got a revolver he could bore a hole through me before I could get within striking distance. Besides, it would be folly to attempt to get near him; he has ears like a cat, and would be sure to discover me. So I'll just track him till I run him to earth. Then I'll warn the officers and he'll go back to Sing-Sing."

And acting upon these thoughts, the Virginian skulked along, taking advantage of every shadow that afforded concealment. He feared that at any moment the pursued man might take it into his head to look carefully behind him in quest of a spy.

But the disguised man never once thought of such a thing as a spy upon his track. Why should he? What subtle power is there in nature to warn him of danger? He "worked by wit, not by witch-

cast a short, quick glance behind him. It was done more out of habit than from suspicion of danger. The hunted deer starts at the whirl of a dead leaf, and so the human, who knows that all honest hands are raised against him, sees cause for flight in every dark shadow.

But the man again turned his head, he had seen naught to excite his suspicions. He had not noticed the watcher on the other side of the street, gliding after him with stealthy tread.

Down Twenty-third street to Avenue A, along Avenue A to Essex street, through Essex to Rutgers, and through Rutgers street to the river front.

It was plain that the man had selected the unfrequented side streets, where the homes of the working-class were situated, rather than the crowded

The colonel advanced cautiously along the dock, and, concealed behind one of the pillars which supported the roof, saw the man he had tracked so patiently go up to the office of the steamer, pay his fare, and receive the key of his state-room; then he went up the stairs which led to the upper cabin.

"Now I've got you!" the spy muttered, in fierce joy. "I must warn the officers in some way. The boat won't leave before twelve, and it's only about nine now. That gives me three hours to send a message to the detectives and get them here."

Then the colonel took out of his pocket a small memorandum-book, and tore a leaf out of it. On the leaf he wrote:

"John Blaine is on steamer Bridgeport. Come at

once or he'll be off. Steamer will leave at twelve to-night. I will be here until you come.

"(Signed), The man who gave information before."

Then he folded the leaf up, and on the outside directed it to Captain Kelso, Mulberry street.

"Now I must get some one to carry this," he muttered, as he walked down the dock toward the street, "for I mustn't leave this pier. This fellow is a slippery customer, and I don't intend to give him a chance to escape, not that I think though that he has any suspicion the meshes of the law are closing around him."

At the entrance to the dock he halted in the gateway.

"Some sharp boy would do," he said, communing with himself, "but the trouble is to find one."

Then he crossed over to the other side of the street, still keeping a sharp watch on the gateway.

In five minutes or so a ragged little fellow, evidently a newsboy or a bootblack, came along down Catherine street, whistling merrily.

The Virginian took a good look at him, and guessed from his face that he was a sharp little fellow, so he called out to him:

"Come here, boy; I want you."

The youngster stopped whistling and approached, evidently astonished at the summons.

"Do you want a job?"

"You bet!" replied the youth, tersely.

"Do you know where the police head-quarters are, in Mulberry street?"

The boy looked at the colonel suspiciously for a moment before he answered the question. He and his tribe looked upon the police as natural enemies.

"Maybe I do," he replied, slowly, plainly inspired by a feeling of distrust.

"I want you to carry this note to Captain Kelso, at the police station in Mulberry street, as fast as you can go, and when you come back with the officers I'll give you a dollar."

"Pr'aps you won't be here?" the boy said, suspiciously.

"Well, here's fifty cents in advance, and I'll give you the other fifty when you come back."

"I'll do it!" exclaimed the youth, clutching the "stamp."

"Be sure and don't forget the name, Captain Kelso."

"Oh, I know him. I blacks boots on Broadway, I does; I know 'em all!"

"And if the captain isn't there, give it to the next officer, or the detectives, Irving or Lane."

"I know 'em both, Cap."

"Now be off with you, fast as you can run," and the colonel gave the note into the boy's hand, and the youngster started up Catherine street at full speed.

"Now, John Blaine, the devil deserts you, and I'll have the handcuffs on your wrists before you are three hours older!" the colonel exclaimed, fiercely, as he returned the pier.

CHAPTER XXIX.

JOHN BLAINE'S TERROR.

AND while the detectives were searching high and low for the escaped convict, John Blaine, scouring through the thieves' dens, in the "Bloody Sixth," the whisky shops of Mackerelville, and the haunts of crime "along shore," keeping diligent watch at the ferries and the railroad stations, that sagacious gentleman had remained quietly concealed in the Madison avenue house.

As he had justly observed, who would think of looking for a State-prison bird in a "brown-stone" cage? That was a point beyond the skill of the cutest detective in the force. Crime consorts with poverty and rags, not with wealth and costly garments.

Adjoining Ernestine's chamber was a little hall bedroom. In years gone by it had been the girl's play-room, and now had been transformed into a sort of wardrobe, or receptacle for trunks and other articles belonging to Ernestine not in constant use. As it had been commonly kept locked, the hunted felon decided at once that it was the most suitable room in the house for him to take refuge in. And then, too, as a door communicated with the chamber of the girl, she could easily furnish him with food without exciting any suspicions.

And so John Blaine took possession of the little room, and the girl locked him in safely.

It was an easy matter to supply him with food, for the felon was a light, delicate eater, and the girl simply gave orders to serve her breakfast in her own room, and also had a lunch provided at night.

One of the first articles that Blaine had asked the girl to procure for him was a small hand mirror, and day by day the escaped convict anxiously consulted it, and, as he did so, cursed niggard nature that she had not gifted him with a heavy beard, that growing, would have served for a disguise.

At the end of a week a scanty mustache ornamented his upper lip and that was all. He cursed right roundly when he saw that he might wait a month or more before his chin would be at all altered by the hairy disguise. And then John Blaine made up his mind to wait no longer. He chafed at the confinement, for he was still a prisoner, although guarded by no jailer but his own sweet will. He resolved upon a plan of escape. Making out a list, he instructed the girl to procure for him certain articles, and also told her how much money he should require, and she, willing slave, procured the articles he wished and the money that he had called for.

Then, planning out his method of escaping the keen search which he felt sure was still kept up for John Blaine, he put on his disguise and watched his opportunity to steal out of the house without attracting the attention of any of its inmates.

In the afternoon he had taken occasion to bid Ernestine good-by, and tell her that he should probably attempt to escape from the city that night.

And the girl, seated in the parlor, listening to Blackie's earnest conversation, seemingly with ears for the words of the man she loved alone, heard the jar of the door, cautiously as the fugitive had closed it behind him, and she guessed quickly who it was that had stolen from the house, like a thief in the night, with noiseless footfall. Then in the heart of the girl swelled an earnest prayer that she might never look upon the face of John Blaine again.

And Blaine himself, disguised in the light wig and

dressed in a handsome business suit, covered by a dark overcoat, walked carelessly down the street with as little fear as though a heavy reward had not been set upon him, and the keenest detectives in all great New York were not searching night and day, eager to place the iron manacles upon his wrists and send him back again to the convict's cell within Sing-Sing's gloomy walls.

Confident in his disguise, the escaped felon would not have hesitated to have walked boldly by the whole force of the Central Office, but Blaine had the bump of caution well developed, and was not disposed to run needless risks, so he shaped his course to avoid the more crowded thoroughfares, where he might be apt to run across a detective officer.

And safe at last in his state-room on board the steamer "Bridgeport," Blaine sat down on the edge of the berth and meditated.

"So far, so good," he muttered, in a tone of satisfaction, as he gleefully rubbed his palms together; "here I am on board the steamer, and not a single bloodhound in all New York the wiser. Coming down as I did at a time when the streets were full of people, the chance of escaping detection was ten times as good as if I had waited until later and the streets were less crowded. The first and most difficult move of all has succeeded, so let me think over the rest of the game. First, the necessity: to leave the country; then the problem: how to do so without detection. The officers naturally would watch the principal avenues of egress from the city. Two ways of escape: the first, to fly to the Far West and bury oneself amid the canyons of the Rocky Mountains, or find concealment on the prairies of Texas; the second, to take steamer for a foreign country, which plan I have adopted. The detectives will watch the foreign steamers and the railway depots, but the steamer Bridgeport, bound for the city of Bridgeport, they will not watch, for what felon with a price set upon him would be so foolish as to think of fleeing to that quiet little city; but there I shall take a train on the Housatonic Railway, which will take me to Pittsfield, and there I take a train on the Boston and Albany, which carries me to Worcester, then I change again and go from Worcester to Lowell, and then to Lawrence, thus getting on the direct road to Portland, Maine, without passing through Boston, where the police doubtless have been warned to keep a good look-out for a certain John Blaine. Then from Portland I go straight to Halifax, and there take steamer for England," and then the felon chuckled merrily to himself. "I think I have planned it well," he continued; "I avoid Boston and the direct express routes between New York and that city, and so lessen the chance of meeting any New York detective who might penetrate my disguise. In two or three years at most I can come back. In that time the chance is good that a pardon can be procured for me, or even if that fails, time in its flight brings forgetfulness, and, long before I wish to return, John Blaine, the escaped convict, and his crime alike may be forgotten. It was very unlucky that I did not kill the fellow outright," Blaine murmured, thoughtfully. "It seems to me that the worse the crime the better the chance to escape punishment nowadays."

And the man laughed—his old careless laugh—as he spoke, the laugh that was so musical and full of glee.

"Well, I might as well go to bed," he said, suddenly, after a few moments of quiet meditation. "I haven't undressed for a week, and a good night's rest will be a luxury. Almost every night, while lying concealed in that snug little hole, I dreamed that I felt the touch of the officers reclaiming the escaped bird; but to-night, when I'm fast asleep and they draw in the gang-plank and cast off the ropes, I can bid farewell to danger."

And then, with the bright, cheery smile upon his face, he rose to his feet and removed his overcoat. He happened to glance toward the window of the little state-room. The glass was protected by a blind, through which the rays of the rising moon were vainly endeavoring to force a way.

A vague impulse, springing up he knew not why, induced him to open the window and blind. The latter he opened but a little way, enough to peep out. It was no fear of danger that urged him to look upon the night, for he felt as free from peril as though his feet already trod the deck of the Cunard steamer, and he saw the frowning fortification of Halifax growing blue and indistinct in the dim vista of the distance.

And then, as John Blaine looked cautiously through the little opening—for caution had become a second nature to the man, who for years had been an Ishmaelite, his hand against his fellow-man, and all men's hands against him—he saw a sight which chilled his bold, brave heart, that so seldom knew a touch of fear, and made his head reel, as though the damp dews of death were gathering upon his brow.

The state-room which John Blaine occupied was situated ten feet or so from the gangway by means of which he had come on board, and, as the stern of the steamer was swung out a little from the dock-side, it commanded a view of the dock-door, and there, in the opening in the covered pier-side, leaning carelessly up against a pillar, with the rays of a light falling full upon his face, and his arms folded across his breast, John Blaine recognized the Virginian colonel, Richard Campbell, his deadliest foe.

With parted lips and clenched teeth and a face ghastly pale, Blaine gazed upon the calm, immovable features of the man who had pursued him for years with intent to take his life.

All the detectives that New York could boast, headed by Chief Kelso in person, could not have shaken John Blaine's iron nerves had they come trooping upon the pier, and he knew that escape was impossible and that the convict's cell would hold him prisoner before another night could come, as did the sight of Campbell's face.

CHAPTER XXX.

A CLOSE SHAVE.

BUT for the hand that rested on the window-sill and thus afforded support, the iron-hearted felon would have sunk to the ground, for the sight of Campbell seemed to chill the blood in his veins and paralyze even the heart itself in its action.

And had the spy happened to have raised his eyes he could not have helped discovering the white face that glared so fearfully from the little opening. But Campbell never once thought of glancing at the upper part of the boat. His eyes were intently fixed

upon the open space inside the steamer, at the foot of the steps which led to the upper cabin, ready at any moment to dodge back out of sight if discovery seemed probable.

At last, with a great effort, John Blaine aroused himself from the trance of terror into which he had fallen. He drew back from the window and nearly closed the blind, only allowing an inch or so of space to remain open; so that through the crack he could watch the movements of the Virginian without fear of being discovered by him, should he happen to raise his gaze to the upper part of the boat.

And then John Blaine, with an anxious face, pondered over the situation. At first he strove to convince himself that the presence of Campbell was but an accident—that he was not in pursuit of him; but, the heart of the hunted man whispered otherwise. His instinct told him that it was for John Blaine alone that his ancient foe waited so patiently. And then, that thought accepted as truth, came the question, what is he waiting for? Why not explode the mine at once and give John Blaine back to the striped felon's garb and the convict's fare? In a second thought Blaine guessed the truth.

"He has sent for the officers and is waiting for them to come," he muttered in hoarse tones, which seemed strange and unnatural even to himself. "My evil genius has placed this man upon my track! How could he discover me in this disguise?"

To the mind of the fugitive the struggle seemed almost decided already. In imagination he felt again the cold clasp of the handcuffs on his wrists, and heard the sharp clink, as the bolts snapped home, which proclaimed him a prisoner.

With a desperate effort he roused himself from the stupor of despair which had come so suddenly upon him.

"I'll not give up!" he said, shutting his little white teeth together, and clinching his hands until the pink nails cut into the flesh. "I must get out of this! I'll not stay here to be taken like a rat in a trap! I'll not wait quietly until the man-hunters come for their prey! I'll make another bold dash for freedom and strive to shake off this human bloodhound who seems destined to hunt me down to my grave!"

Then he put on his overcoat again and left the state-room. Already he had formed a plan of escape. He had noticed that at the other end of the boat another gangway led into the dark, and that the deck-hands of the steamer were busy trucking freight over it from the dock into the boat. By means of the upper gangway he could get upon the dock without discovery.

Blaine proceeded to execute his plan at once. As he had anticipated, Campbell, from his place of concealment, could not watch both gangways; but after John Blaine had gained the dock, he discovered that he could not make his way into the street without passing within ten or fifteen feet of Campbell.

Blaine had marked the pillar behind which he supposed the spy to be standing, and now he sought to discover if his guess was correct. Cautiously approaching, taking advantage of the huge pile of freight for concealment, he at last got within view of the gangway, and discovered, to his surprise, that Campbell was not there. He guessed at once that the watcher had stepped on board the boat for a moment, and Blaine thanked his lucky stars for the fortunate chance which had removed the spy from his path.

He was quick to improve the opportunity.

With a rapid step, yet in a careless manner, he walked past the gangway toward the entrance to the street, and as he passed the opening he gave a glance into the boat, expecting to see Campbell standing on board; but no Campbell did he see!

Straight onward he went, and soon he left the shadows of the pier and entered upon the street. Again he looked around expecting to see Campbell, and again his search was fruitless. Again he wondered what had become of the tireless tracker. As he had traversed the short distance between the spot where the first gang-plank led into the steamer and the gate of the dock, the thought had come to him that perhaps Campbell had stepped to the entrance to the dock, to watch for the approach of the officer, for in his own mind, Blaine felt certain that it was for the assistance of the police that the Virginian waited. And as he had approached the gate of the pier, he had drawn a small revolver from his pistol-pocket, and raising the hammer, held the weapon ready in his hand.

It was lucky for the human bloodhound that he did not encounter the man, whom he had hunted down so relentlessly, at the gate of the dock that dark night, for, nerved to desperation, the escaped convict would not have hesitated for a single instant in slaying in cold blood the only man in all the world who could chill his heart, or render powerless the muscles of his strong right arm.

John Blaine's heart gave a great leap for joy as he gazed about him in the darkness when he was fairly outside the pier-gate. The figure of his foe was nowhere to be seen.

A few dark forms were passing by on the other side of the street, but there was no one near to the entrance to the dock.

Blaine quickened his pace, and passed over the open space toward Catherine street.

"By Heaven, that was about the tightest place that I've been in for many a long day!" he muttered, as he crossed the square. "I had better watch my chance and get back to Ernestine's house as soon as possible. There, at least, I am safe. What unlucky chance put this man again on my track? Am I never to get clear of him? Is it to be my fate to be hunted by this demon unto my dying day?"

Then the hunted man proceeded up Catherine street, and as he mingled with the little knots of people passing up and down that thoroughfare, his mind became easier, and a feeling of security came over him. He thrust the revolver into the side pocket of his overcoat—little danger of his needing the weapon for the present. His greatest fear now was that he might encounter some detective who would recognize him; and yet, when he came to reflect, he saw that there really was very little probability of that.

"Not much danger," he murmured, as he walked along; "there's very few of the detectives that know me personally, and the description which has been given of me would be more apt to perplex an officer, disguised as I am, than to aid him in discovering me. The John Blaine who escaped from Sing-

Sing has black hair, cut short, a clean, smooth face; while I have curly yellow hair and a mustache. Besides, they won't think of seeing me got up in this fashion. I believe that my disguise would deceive any one in the world except this man. He was evidently born to be my evil genius. He had better look out for himself, though," and, as he spoke, Blaine shut his teeth together with a wolfish snap. "In the past I have always fled from him, but in the future if he corners me, I'll turn and fight all I know how."

Then Blaine reflected upon what course to pursue. He had fully decided not to attempt to leave the city at present. The sudden and unexpected appearance of Campbell had taken the "steel" out of him. All that he wished now was to get back to his former hiding-place as quietly as possible; but what troubled him was to find some way to enter the Van Tromp mansion without the knowledge of the inmates, Ernestine excepted. Then suddenly a plan occurred to him.

"I have it," he murmured; "it's simple enough. I'll go to the front door and inquire for Ernestine, and when she comes I'll get a latch-key from her, so that late to-night I can slip into the house and get back to my little den again. It would not do to walk in at first and stay, for some one of the servants might take it into his head to watch me and thus discover that I did not go out again, and that would give rise to gossip and perhaps to my detection."

Having settled this matter satisfactorily in his mind, a thought came to him that brought the smile back again to his cheeks.

"Strange, how all through my life the women have always aided me when the men fought me. A female star was surely in the ascendant when I came into this world, and since has always watched over my house of life. One girl gave me the money by means of which I got out of Sing-Sing, and another saved me from recapture and gave me funds to get out of the country with. No matter what I do, they keep faith with me and will never forget the love that they owe to John Blaine, villain and convict though he is." And hardly had the words left his lips when he made a discovery which chilled his blood again. He was followed.

CHAPTER XXXI.

RUN TO EARTH.

As John Blaine had made the boast that woman's love would cling to him unto his dying day, he had carelessly turned his head around, more from usual caution than absolute fear, and as he did so he caught sight of a figure, that he was sure was Campbell's crossing one of the side streets, a half a block down.

It was but a single glance he got at the man, but that was quite enough. He increased his pace, and, when he got to the next corner, turned abruptly into the side street, and, taking to his heels, ran like a grayhound and almost as noiselessly.

Up the street a single block he went, then turned down at the corner and ran two blocks toward the river, then doubled back again to Catherine street, crossed it and went through to James, then up James to Chatham Square.

The twists and turns of the fugitive would have puzzled the keenest spy. Little wonder then that John Blaine breathed freely when he had crossed Catherine street, got into James street, and passed into the square.

"Now, my fine fellow, if you can follow me after this breather, you must have the scent of a blood-hound," Blaine muttered, as he walked across the open space.

Jumping into a car that was passing, Blaine rode down to the City Hall; then, taking one of the Broadway line of omnibuses at the Astor House, he proceeded up-town.

The reason for this movement was plain; the fugitive did not dare to pass up-town through the Bowery, where he might chance to encounter the spy whose watch he had baffled so cleverly.

And now we will return to Campbell, whom we left leaning against a post, evidently watching the interior of the steamer.

"I wonder if he's gone to bed?" the Virginian mused, finding that the subject of his watch did not come down from the upper cabin. "If so, we shall take him unawares."

And, speculating upon the amount of time that it would take for his messenger to reach the Central Office and return with the police, Campbell remained for quite a time motionless. Then, happening to glance idly down upon the dock, he saw an object on the floor which shone in the dim light like a piece of silver. Supposing it to be a small coin that had been dropped by accident, he stepped forward and stooped to pick it up, but he found that the supposed coin was but the head of one of the dock-spikes, polished by the constant friction of feet shod with leather passing over it.

And this little circumstance, seemingly so trivial, had a strange bearing upon the fortunes of the escaped convict, for, as the Virginian rose from his stooping posture, he happened to glance along the side of the dock toward the upper gangway, and just at that very instant John Blaine's light figure passed over the plank.

The breath of the watcher came quick and hard between his firm-set teeth as his eye glared upon the form of his foe. In an instant the suspicion flashed across his mind that his prey had detected him and was making an effort to escape.

Quickly the Virginian decided upon his course of action. Between the piles of freight was a dark nook, which would give him shelter and yet enable him to see Blaine if he should attempt to pass by and leave the dock.

He crouched down, and ten seconds later saw Blaine walk past. He noted the quick, eager glance of the fugitive as he went by the gangway, and the look confirmed his suspicions.

"He knows I'm after him!" the colonel muttered. Then he came from his hiding-place and crept cautiously after Blaine. He followed him across the square into Catherine street and dogged him up the street, and noticed him, too, when he cast the quick glance behind and then turned into the cross street.

"He's seen me, curse him!" cried Campbell, aloud, in rage, much to the astonishment of the passers-by, and then he darted up the street like a madman, and turning into the dark cross street, whither Blaine had gone, ran on at his topmost speed. When he

reached the first corner, he stopped to listen, uncertain whether to keep on or to turn to the right or to the left. He had halted in the uncertain chance that he might hear the sound of the fugitive's flying footsteps and thus discover the way he had chosen.

The hope was vain; Blaine had far too great a start, and was too fleet and noiseless a runner. In despair the colonel could not help confessing to himself that the convict had gotten the better of him.

But the Virginian possessed his soul with patience and speculated how he might again strike upon the trail. Calmly he reviewed the situation. Frightened from the Bridgeport steamer, Blaine would not be apt to return there. Where, then, would he seek shelter? For shelter he needs must have somewhere before the morning came, for, though his disguise would pass muster well enough at night, it would be apt to be detected by day.

Then to the mind of the colonel came the thoughts of the Madison avenue house which had sheltered the fugitive before. The chances were ten to one that he would seek concealment there. Of course it was almost impossible for Blaine to guess that his retreat was known, or, at all events, it was very unlikely that he should guess it.

And so the Virginian, who hated the escaped convict so bitterly, proceeded at once to the Bowery and took a car up-town.

Getting out at the corner of Third avenue and Thirty-ninth street, he proceeded through until he came to Madison avenue, and again took up his old post of observation.

It was now a little after ten o'clock and the avenue was almost deserted.

As the colonel waited and watched, he suddenly thought of the detectives whom he had summoned to the Bridgeport boat.

"By the time my bird gets snugly housed here they will be back at the Central Office, and then, after he's once in here, he'll not be apt to leave it to-night, and I can go for the officers myself."

Campbell had not been thirty minutes in his post of observation when he saw a figure cross the avenue, coming from the Broadway side, which bore a striking likeness to John Blaine. Campbell was too familiar with Blaine's peculiar, easy, graceful walk to be deceived.

"It's my man!" he muttered, in fierce joy. "I'll bet a thousand dollars against a cent!"

Campbell could hardly remained quiet, so great was his exultation. The prey upon whose track he followed with so keen a scent and with such untiring feet, was walking blindly into the trap.

But, as John Blaine turned on the opposite side of the way to come up the avenue, he halted suddenly, as if he had been transformed by some potent miracle into stone.

The John Blaine that had walked with so free a step and so light a heart down the avenue an hour or two before, was quite a different man to the John Blaine who was now coming up the street, cautious, ill at ease, and expecting to discover a foe in every shadow.

Before, he went straight on, heedless of all around. Now his eyes roved constantly about him, and so keen were they, that the dark figure of the spy concealed though it was in the obscurity of the doorway, did not escape their piercing glances, and it was that discovery that had stopped his onward progress so suddenly.

A single instant only Blaine halted, and then turning around, he walked down the avenue at a fast rate. A second time he resolved to try the plan which before had succeeded so well, but the broad avenue was different from the narrow street, and besides, the Virginian, who had followed him promptly, was hardly half a block behind and not to be shaken off easily.

Turning suddenly to the left, Blaine went down one of the cross streets, but still behind steadily came the tracker.

Campbell was not endeavoring to overtake his prey. He was playing with him as the cat with the mouse. His object was not to lose sight of him, and to run him into the arms of a policeman if he could.

And the two men, though walking quite fast, excited no little attention. Campbell was afraid to raise an alarm lest in the confusion the fugitive should escape. He preferred to run him down himself, as he felt confident he could do.

On the two went, the first turning and twisting, and the second steadily after him. And from Thirty-eighth street to Fourteenth not a policeman did the two encounter.

Down Fourteenth street, heading toward the East River, Blaine went, increasing his walk almost to a run, and Campbell followed closely.

The furious pace had now moderated, the long distance had "winded" both prey and tracker.

Blaine's design was plain, to get into the narrow, dark streets, and then, by sudden turns, elude his pursuer; such was Campbell's thought. But, as Blaine walked on by the long row of tenement-houses, he suddenly darted up the steps of one of them and ran into the house.

CHAPTER XXXII.

SEARCHING THE TENEMENT-HOUSE.

THIS movement on the part of Blaine was quite a surprise to Campbell, but promptly he darted forward and pursued the fugitive into the house. He was only some twenty or thirty paces behind him.

In the hall the Virginian hesitated. Whether Blaine had gone up the stairs toward the roof, or found shelter in some of the apartments, was a puzzle which Campbell speedily perceived would not be easily solved, but as he halted, uncertain, he heard a light footfall descending the stairs, and in a few seconds a boy, apparently about ten years old, came in sight.

A bright idea flashed across the colonel's mind. He would question the boy and find out from him whether the fugitive had passed up-stairs or not.

To his intense delight the boy answered that he had met a man dressed in dark clothes on the third landing, and that he was apparently in a hurry.

Eagerly Campbell questioned him.

"Had he light curly hair?"

"Yes," the boy replied, instantly, "and a very white race."

The colonel was satisfied; it was Blaine beyond a doubt. Then another brilliant idea came to the Virginian. He could dispatch the boy for a policeman, while he watched to see that the fugitive did not es-

cape down the stairs again. The boy willingly agreed to go when Campbell proffered him a twenty-five cent "stamp" for the service.

In five minutes the boy was back again, having found a policeman not twenty steps from the house. Fortune was fairly raining her favors down upon the Virginian now.

Briefly Campbell explained the situation to the officer, but that worthy shook his head in doubt.

"Not much chance of catching him," the officer said, dogmatically. "You see, sir, it's two to one that he's gone straight up to the roof; and once he's there, he kin go over three or four houses, and then get down to the street again; that's the old game."

"They allus lock the door that leads out on the roof 'bout nine," said the boy, who had listened attentively to the conversation.

Campbell jumped eagerly at the hope.

"If the door is locked, we've got him, for he must be somewhere in the house," the colonel exclaimed.

"Right you are, sir!" cried the officer, sagaciously; "and the first thing is to find out if the door is locked. Run up, sonny, and see for us."

The boy departed instantly.

"And as the lad says he passed him on the third landing, we might as well go up there," Campbell suggested.

"Better stop on the second," said the officer; "he might have doubled back after he passed the boy."

"If the door is locked, the inference is plain that he must be concealed in the house," Campbell observed.

"Quite correct!" replied the officer, with a knowing shake of the head.

"And then, I suppose, we must search the rooms?"

"Right you are ag'in; 'tisn't quite 'cording to Hoyle; but then the folks that live in these barracks don't put on many airs, and they generally have a proper respect for the officers of the law. It won't take us long to make the search; not many hiding-places in these little rooms; and I rather flatter myself I kin tell from the cut of their jib when we strike the right apartment. You see," the officer explained, "he's probably got some acquaintances in the house that ain't on the square. I can tell the parties that are 'cross'—that's the thieves' lingo, you know—'bout as soon as I put my two eyes on 'em. I ain't walked these blessed streets for nothing."

The boy returning put an end to the conversation. He reported that the door leading to the roof was locked.

The two had ascended the stairs during their conversation, and met the boy on the second landing.

"We'll have to search the rooms, then," said the officer, thoughtfully. "I tell yer, we'll fix it this way; you know the party, and I don't. I'll knock at the doors and explain what's wanted, then you go through the rooms while I'll keep watch at the door, so that he can't slip by in the entry."

Campbell thought that the plan was good, and assented to it at once.

Then the search began.

The occupants of the room, upon the officer explaining the nature of the business, made but little opposition to the search. The blue uniform produced the proper impression.

Apartment after apartment was visited, but no trace of John Blaine could they find; and at last the two, followed by the boy, who took a great interest in the proceeding, came to the upper landing.

"I live there," said the boy, pointing to the door at the head of the stairs; "and there's only one other family besides us on the floor. There ain't anybody in the front rooms."

"And who lives there, Jimmy?" asked the officer, pointing to the other door facing the entrance, at the head of the stairs, and through which shone a bright light.

"Two girls—they sew fur a livin'," replied the youth.

"I'm afeard this chap is too much for us," said the officer, sagely.

"We might as well search the two rooms, though," Campbell suggested, terribly disappointed at the easy escape of the fugitive, and cursing his own folly that he had not attempted to arrest him in the street, and run the risk of his escape in the confusion.

"Oh, yes; we'll make a clean job of it now that we've got our hands in," the officer answered. "And we'll call upon these two young ladies first, and leave this young feller's roosting-place for the last."

So the officer knocked at the left-hand door, through which shone a bright light.

The door was opened, and a young girl appeared. Even the bluff and astute policeman was impressed with her ladylike appearance, and her remarkable beauty.

The girl was Mary Martin.

"I beg your pardon, miss," said the officer, gallantly; "we would like to look through your rooms a bit, if you've no objection. The fact is there is an escaped convict got into the house and hidden himself away somewhere, and we're trying to hunt him out."

"Yes, sir," said the girl, evidently very much alarmed, despite her efforts to conceal her agitation.

"Don't be afraid, miss," said the officer, reassuringly; "we ain't a-going to do you the least bit of harm. Of course, we know that the man we are arter ain't in here, but we're ordered to search the hull house; and duty, miss, you know, is duty. We can't go to run ag'in' orders, however much we'd like to oblige a lady like yourself. So if you jist let the gentleman walk in, he'll look round, and it will be over in a minute."

"Certainly, sir," said the girl, and she stepped back from the door.

Campbell, who had been standing behind the policeman, did not catch sight of the girl's face until she spoke, and the policeman had moved to one side; then he stared at her like one in a dream.

Mary, retreating into the room, did not notice the look, but the officer did, and he was utterly amazed.

"What's the matter with you, old man?" the policeman asked in astonishment, nudging Campbell in the side with his elbow as he spoke. "You seem struck all of a heap."

"It is most wonderful!" Campbell muttered, in a low tone, apparently talking to himself, and not heeding the question of the officer.

"Well, she's about as handsome as they make 'em," the policeman said, with the manner of one who considers himself a judge in such matters. "But come, hurry up your cakes; I must get back to my post."

With an effort, recovering somewhat from his astonishment, Campbell walked into the room.

In the little kitchen a cat would have found it a difficult matter to have found concealment, let alone a human. In the inner room it was the same, and in the dark bedroom, which led from the kitchen, in the bed or under it, were the only places where a man could hide. John Blaine was neither beneath the bed nor on it; under it was but empty space, and the smooth surface of the bed-covering showed no outline of a human form concealed beneath.

The policeman had remained outside as before, but as the door had been left open, he could easily notice the manner of the searcher; and great was his wonder thereat, for Campbell seemed like a man in a dream. Now and then he would stare at the girl, with a vacant expression upon his face, and pass his hand over his forehead in a strange, mechanical sort of way.

"Blamed if he don't look jist like a loonatic!" the officer observed, sagely, to himself.

The search was ended, and Campbell stood in the center of the room looking around him with a peculiar, dreamy look upon his face as though he expected to see John Blaine pop out from some vacant corner, like a jack-in-a-box. Then suddenly he turned to the girl.

"I beg your pardon, miss; what's your name?" he asked.

"Mary Martin, sir," she answered, astonished at the question.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

AN UNACCOUNTABLE ACTION.

"Come along, Cap!" cried the officer, impatiently; "we're losing time."

Another long look Campbell gave at the face of the girl, much to her astonishment and dismay, and then he turned abruptly upon his heel and walked out of the room, closing the door behind him.

"What's the matter, old man?" demanded the policeman, decidedly astonished at the strange behavior of the Virginian; "you ain't gitting looney, are ye?"

"I can't understand it!" the colonel muttered, his thoughts evidently far away.

"Can't understand what? how this chap has got away, eh?" the officer questioned. "It's plain enough to me. He either didn't come up-stairs at all, or else the key was in the door which leads to the roof, and he jist went out, took the key with him, and locked the door on the outside; then he ran over the roofs and went down to the street through some other house. It's an old dodge. I've seen a chap play it right in the daytime with two or three officers smack at his heels, and git away, too."

"No, it's not that," the Virginian muttered, his mind returning slowly from the dreamland in which it had been wandering. "It's the face of that girl in there," and Campbell pointed to the room which he had just left.

"What of it?" asked the officer, in wonder. "She's a pretty girl and a ladylike girl, too, but I don't see anything in her face for to knock a man all of a heap."

"I don't understand it myself," the colonel said, slowly. "It has made a wonderful impression upon me. The face seems so familiar, and yet I can't remember that I ever saw one like it before."

The policeman looked at the Virginian for a moment in wonder, and then muttered something in an undertone about "a first-class subject for a first-class 'loonatic' asylum." Then he advanced briskly toward the door at the head of the stairs and rapped.

The door was opened by Mrs. Murphy, the mother of the boy, in person. The officer explained his business, and Campbell proceeded to search the rooms.

There were only Mrs. Murphy and Chocolate, who was tending the baby, in the apartments; the rest of the family had gone off to attend a "wake."

The sagacious officer expected to again see Campbell struck "all of a heap," as he would have expressed it, at the sight of Chocolate, for he had got an idea in his head that his companion was slightly cracked in the upper story, and that the fresh, innocent face of a young girl developed his madness. But the officer was disappointed. Beyond a single searching glance, Campbell paid no attention to the young girl.

Within three minutes the search was concluded, and no trace of John Blaine was discovered.

And as Campbell closed the door behind him and stood on the landing, apparently in deep thought, he cast an earnest glance at the door of Mary's room, as if he wished again to behold the face that had affected him so strangely.

The policeman, who was half-way down-stairs, noticed the hesitation of his companion, and stopped in wonder to observe him.

"Blessed if he ain't at it again!" he muttered.

But Campbell conquered the strong impulse and slowly followed the officer down-stairs, pausing every now and then to cast a glance behind him, as though he was half inclined to go back.

The policeman kept his eye upon him and became more and more convinced that his suspicion was correct as regarded the lunacy of the searcher after John Blaine. Then suddenly across the mind of the worthy officer flashed the thought that perhaps the statement of Campbell that he had chased the escaped convict into the tenement-house was but the delusion of a madman. And the officer swore like a trooper to himself when he reflected that he had wasted half an hour or more in the search.

"I wonder if I hadn't ought to 'take him in?'" muttered the policeman, dubiously, as he stood on the sidewalk, and surveyed Campbell, who was descending the steps.

But out in the cold night air, in the face lit up by the flickering glare of the gaslight, the policeman could detect no trace of madness. The Virginian was himself again.

"I am really sorry I've put you to all this trouble," Campbell said. "It is a wonder how this man has contrived to elude us. I am of the opinion, though, that the boy was mistaken, and that he did not go up-stairs at all."

"He might have got off by way of the roof, you know," suggested the officer.

"Perhaps so."

"Well, I'm sorry we didn't nab him," the officer observed, reflectively. "I should have liked to have raked in that little five hundred reward that is offered for him; but better luck next time. We can't

'keno' every lick, you know. I'll jist tell the rounds-man 'bout the affair, and he'll warn all the officers on post near to keep their eyes open for this chap. Maybe we'll get him 'fore morning now; good-night."

The officer moved off; and from that time until he was relieved from his beat, he found plenty of occupation in arguing with himself whether the Virginian was a sane man or a "loonatic."

And Campbell, in front of the tenement-house, gazed up at the lighted windows, as though with his piercing eyes he would tear from the dark bricks and the transparent glass the secret of John Blaine's almost miraculous escape.

For full twenty minutes the colonel remained motionless as a statue, his brain in a whirl of conflicting thoughts.

Then suddenly he seemed to recover his senses.

"Much good it will do me to stand staring here, like a fool, up at this building," he muttered, savagely. "Oh, what an idiot I was that I didn't jump upon him in the street! I took a fiendish pleasure in following so close upon his track and thinking of the agony that he must endure in his fruitless efforts to elude me. But at last he did the trick and threw me off the scent. By this time he is probably a mile or so away, and laughing in his sleeve at his success in getting the best of me. I had the bird right in my hand and yet did not grasp him. I'll know better next time. But now, what shall I do to hit upon his track again?" Then Campbell turned and walked up the street, meditating deeply. "He will not attempt to go back to the house in Madison avenue, now that he knows that his retreat there is discovered. He will hardly try to leave the city, for he will surely guess that this night's work will render the police doubly vigilant. There's only one thing for me to do: watch that Irishman; he is in communication with Blaine, and will lead me to him again, just as he does this time. And now the first thing for me to do is to go down to the Central Office and give all the particulars of my chase to-night."

And jumping into a street-car at the corner, Campbell rode at once down-town. Some twenty minutes after the rooms of Mrs. Murphy had been searched by the amateur detective, Chocolate resigned the baby to Mrs. Murphy, bid her good-night, and proceeded to her own apartments. To her astonishment she found that the door was locked.

She rapped, and after a moment or so she could hear Mary's footsteps as she came to the door, but the girl did not open it, but spoke:

"Who is it?"

"Me—Chocolate," replied the second Mary, emphatically, if not with a due regard for Lindley Murray. Then there was a delay of a minute or so, at which Chocolate wondered greatly, and Mary unlocked the door and opened it.

As Chocolate entered the little kitchen she was astonished at Mary's appearance. Her face was deadly pale, and she was trembling in every limb, evidently under the influence of some great excitement.

"Why, Mary, what is the matter with you, and why did you lock the door?"

"I—I was frightened," Mary stammered, in a low voice, evidently speaking only with a great effort.

The explanation was reasonable, and Chocolate did not wonder now that the girl had locked the door. She came close up to the trembling girl and placed her arm around her waist.

"Just think of an escaped convict coming right here in the house; we might all be murdered," she said. "Why, how you're trembling, Mary. I've got a bottle of hartshorn in the pocket of my black dress in the bedroom; I'll get it."

Chocolate advanced toward the dark room, but with a cry of alarm, Mary flung herself before the door.

"No, no, you must not enter here!" she exclaimed, wildly.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

GUESSING THE TRUTH.

CHOCOLATE was thunderstruck; she looked at Mary in utter astonishment. The girl stood with her back against the bedroom door, her arms outstretched as though she feared that Chocolate would attempt to enter the room in spite of her warning.

Mary's face was deadly pale, and she was trembling in every limb like an aspen leaf.

"Why, Mary, what is the matter with you?" Chocolate asked, in wonder.

"Nothing, nothing," the girl replied, hurriedly, and with trembling accents.

"Why don't you want me to go in that room?" and, as she asked the question, Chocolate advanced a step as though she intended to force her way in.

Mary's features became convulsed; the tears came from her dark eyes and streamed down the pallid cheeks, as with a trembling voice she answered:

"Oh, Chocolate, don't ask me why; but if you ever loved me, please keep away. I have a reason or I would not ask."

Chocolate's sharp eyes looked searchingly for a moment into the agitated face of the girl, who, under the influence of the gaze, drooped her head like a guilty creature, and the dark eyes hid themselves under the white lids.

A minute the young girl stood motionless and looked searchingly at Mary, whose wildly-heaving bosom and streaming eyes betrayed the anguish which was so terrible. Then Chocolate turned suddenly around, and retreating, sat down by the table.

But though Chocolate had sat down quietly by the table and seemed to have give up all idea of entering the little bedroom, still Mary stood by the door.

A horrible suspicion had begun to creep over Chocolate's mind, and though she vainly strove to drive it away, the effort was useless, and it grew stronger and stronger.

And Mary, looking from her station at the door of the little bedroom into the face of the girl seated by the table, saw the suspicion written on Chocolate's face.

"Oh, I know that you think that I am acting strangely!" she cried, impulsively, "and I can not tell you why I act so."

"I know," Chocolate replied, quietly.

Mary did not speak, she only drooped her head again on her bosom and the tears started afresh.

"You need not say a single word, Mary; I know the reason why you do not wish me to go into the room," and Chocolate spoke quite severely, and both her voice and manner told that she considered herself aggrieved.

Mary started in alarm, and with outstretched hands she advanced a step toward the girl as though to implore her mercy.

Then Chocolate gazed just a moment into the pale face, noticed the imploring eyes and the trembling lips, and her heart melted.

"I think that you have acted real mean, Mary!" she cried, impulsively. "I never kept any secret from you. You might have told me that you had a lover that you didn't wish any one to see and I wouldn't have said any thing against it; then there wouldn't have been any need to hide him away in your bedroom as if he was a thief."

Mary recoiled as if she had been stricken in the face, and she gazed at the girl with parted lips and a strange, wild light in her eyes.

And as Chocolate looked at her, she began to believe that Mary was losing her senses.

Then, with a great effort, the girl seemed to recover herself.

"What are you saying?" she exclaimed.

"What you can't deny," replied Chocolate, firmly. "I'm not blind, Mary, and you needn't think that I am. I know the reason why you do not wish me to enter that room is that some one is concealed there, and that some one is your lover."

Again Mary's head sunk in confusion, and low were the words which came slowly from her trembling lips.

"Yes, I will not deny any thing that you have said; and you can reproach me as much as you please; I deserve it all."

"I haven't got any right to say any thing against you!" Chocolate cried, abruptly, "except that I think that you might have told me something about it, and I don't think that you have acted quite right with somebody else either, but that's none of my business."

A convulsive shudder shook Mary's form. She understood only too well to whom Chocolate referred.

"Well, I s'pose you want me to go out, don't you?" the girl asked, finding that Mary did not speak.

She silently nodded her head in reply.

"I don't see why there is any need of making such a mystery about it," Chocolate said, rising.

Mary only sighed, but did not speak.

"I s'pose that there's some good reason, eh?"

Again the girl nodded her head.

"Well, I'll go and see Mrs. Murphy again. I believe that that baby likes me better than it does its own mother. I s'pose I can come back when I hear him go down-stairs?" and Chocolate made a face at Mary as she asked the question.

"Yes," Mary replied, evidently paying but little attention to the question though.

As Chocolate laid her hand upon the door-knob a sudden thought occurred to Mary, and hurriedly she passed her arm around Chocolate's neck and whispered in the girl's ear.

"You must not tell anybody of what you have guessed!" she exclaimed, earnestly.

"About some one being in that room?"

"Yes."

"Why of course not! What a great goose you must think I am."

"Promise me that you will not breathe a single word of it to any living soul until I give you leave."

Chocolate wondered greatly at the anxiety of the girl.

"Of course not!" Chocolate replied, promptly. "Don't you suppose that I can keep a secret? I'm sure that no one ever thought that I was a tattletale."

"Yes, yes, I know that!" Mary exclaimed, evidently in deep distress of mind. "I did not mean to say that you were, but if you only knew how anxious I am that no one should know any thing about the matter."

"I don't see why you should be worried about it," Chocolate replied, perplexed at the agitation of the other. "I'm sure that it's no one's business whether you have a gentleman come to see you or not. But, Mary, I do feel real hurt that you didn't tell me something about it. I'm sure that I wouldn't keep any thing from you."

"Don't speak about that!" Mary cried. "I would have told you if I could."

"Why, did he want it kept secret?" Chocolate queried.

"Oh, if you love me, don't ask me anything more about it at all!" the girl beseeched. "I must not speak, even to explain my own actions."

"Never mind, dear; don't worry," and Chocolate kissed the pale cheek of the other caressingly. "I won't bother you any more," but, as she spoke, a sudden thought came to her. "I would like to ask you just one question, Mary, and you needn't answer it if you don't want to."

"Well?"

Then the girl dropped her voice to a whisper.

"Mary, dear, do you think that you have acted just right with Mr. Stewart?"

A convulsive shudder passed rapidly over Mary's slight form, and then she hid her face on Chocolate's bosom, and the tears came fast and free.

"Don't cry, dear," whispered Chocolate, soothingly. "I couldn't help asking the question. But I think that you ought not to have had anything to say to Mr. Stewart at all. It will only make both of you suffer."

"How could I tell that he would come? I have not seen him for years," the girl murmured, between her sobs. "I thought perhaps that he was dead. I told Mr. Stewart, too, that I could not be his wife when I saw that he was really in earnest. I could not help loving him; it was in my heart and I was not strong enough to crush it. I knew that our love was a dream, and that when I woke from it it would tear my heart terribly, but I could not help myself."

From the broken sentences, separated by sobs, Chocolate guessed the girl's secret.

It was the old, sad story, that the adage warns us of, "Better be off with the old love before you are on with the new," and so Chocolate whispered in Mary's ears, but the girl only replied with a sob.

Chocolate pressed a little soft kiss on Mary's pale lips and then left the room.

CHAPTER XXXV.

GOOD EVEN IN THE WOLF.

A DEEP sigh came from Mary's lips as the door closed behind Chocolate. Slowly she turned the key in the lock, thus preventing any intrusion, and then opened the door of the dark bedroom.

"You can come out; we are alone," Mary said, in a low, sad voice.

Then from the darkness of the little room into the light of the kitchen came John Blaine.

The old careless smile played around the corners of his handsome mouth and shone winningly in the depths of his great, lustrous gray-blue eyes.

And where in the confines of the little dark bedroom had the hunted felon found refuge from the keen eyes of the man-tracker, Campbell?

A glance into the room and the mystery is solved.

The bedstead occupied by the two girls was quite a wide one—a bargain picked up at a second-hand store by careful, skillful Chocolate—and the mattress was fully a foot narrower than the bedstead upon which it was placed. Blaine had pushed the mattress over from the side of the bed next to the wall to the front and laid himself down upon the slats of the bedstead in the vacant space; then the girl had drawn the bedclothes over him and adjusted them carefully, and thus concealed him from sight.

John Blaine crossed the room, drew the little rocking-chair from its place in the corner and sat down in it, and, as he stretched his legs out lazily on the floor, a long-drawn breath of relief came from his lips.

The girl, motionless by the table, her head resting carelessly upon it, surveyed him, with a mournful smile upon her fair features.

"A pretty narrow squeeze that time, my dear," he said, with a knowing shake of the head. "If it had not been for the fortunate circumstance that your bed was a foot wider than the mattress, and that you had wit enough to think of that slight difference in the very nick of time, your humble servant would have had his wrists ornamented by an elegant pair of steel bracelets, and by this time would have been half-way to that celebrated specimen of Egyptian architecture popularly known as the Tombs, escorted by a guard of blue-coated gentlemen renowned for manly proportions, and equally eminently distinguished for putting in practical form the Scriptural injunction, 'take the stranger in.'" And then John Blaine leaned back in the rocking-chair and laughed heartily, but quietly.

Mary looked at him with her soft, sad eyes, an expression of hopeless misery upon her face.

And getting over his merriment, Blaine noticed the look.

"Why, Mary, what's the matter?" he asked; "your face looks as if you had lost every friend that you had in the world."

The girl sighed, then strove to smile; but the attempt was a sorry failure.

"Don't look downhearted; all is well now, dear, and I am as safe from these human bloodhounds, at present, as though a thousand broad miles of ocean rolled between me and them," he said in his careless, cheery way. "I have always been a lucky fellow, all my life, but this streak of luck to-night really astonishes me. Why, just think, Mary, my dear; I didn't know—didn't even dream that you were within a hundred miles of New York city, and when I dashed into this house it was by the merest accident in the world that I chose it rather than the one before or after it. The man-hunter was right on my track and I had to double upon him some way. I felt that it was neck or nothing. My idea was to get onto the roof and cross over, and descend into some other house. You can judge of my horror, Mary, when I got up to the door which leads to the roof and found that it was locked. For a moment I was like a man stunned by a heavy blow on the head, but I recovered quickly, though. I didn't have any time to sit down, fold my hands, and meditate upon my next movement. I suddenly remembered seeing a bright light in this room as I passed, and then a plan to baffle the bloodhounds flashed through my mind. I guessed that they would suspect my plan to escape by the roof and that they would follow me up there; so I descended, and knocking at your door, walked right in. It was lucky for me, Mary, that the door happened to be unlocked. I had a couple of rings on my finger here, and I was going to pretend that I wished to sell them, and get the occupant or occupants of the room into conversation, and then, when I heard the hunters pass up to the roof, I intended to slip out and escape down-stairs. See how lucky it was that I stumbled upon you, for that plan of searching each room that these eager gentlemen put in operation would have caught me sure; but, for the place of concealment that you thought of, Mary, I shall be eternally grateful."

"What do you intend to do now?" the girl asked, slowly.

"Well, I do not exactly know," he replied, reflectively. "I had a very secure hiding-place, but by some accident it was discovered. Do you know the danger that I am exposed to?"

"Yes," she answered: "I read the particulars of your escape in the newspaper."

"Mary, you are not very well-to-do in the world, are you?" and as Blaine asked the abrupt question, his eyes wandered round the scantily-furnished room.

"No; I have had a very hard struggle," she said, slowly. "I have been sick a great deal, and even when I am well, I am not strong enough to work hard."

"Do you know that there is a reward of five hundred dollars offered for my capture?" he asked, carelessly, but his keen eyes were bent searchingly on the girl's face as he spoke.

"Yes; I read about it in the newspaper."

"And, Mary, when that man entered yonder room, all you would have had to do was to whisper a single word in his ear, or even point with your finger without speaking, and you would have got five hundred dollars—a fortune to you."

"Had the reward been five million instead of five hundred, neither lip nor finger would have moved to betray you," the girl said, firmly.

Just a single instant, John Blaine—heart of ice and head of iron—looked into the pale face of the girl, beautiful even now in its tearful anguish, and then a smile, which told plainly of conscious power, came over his face.

"Come here, Mary," he said, extending his arms to

her. "I believe that you speak the truth, and yet there's mighty few humans in this world that money won't buy."

The girl, obedient to his request, came slowly over to him and knelt down by his side. Caressingly he passed his arm around her slender waist, and with the hand of the other pinched the soft white cheeks.

Then he stroked her head and imprinted a kiss upon the full ripe lips that lacked some of their wonted color, and yet were none the less sweet nor soft.

"You're a dear little girl," he murmured, "and I'm a brute to have acted toward you as I have done. But I can't help it. The leopard can't change his spots at will, nor I my cruel, capricious nature. It was born in me and so must remain. You wouldn't betray me, and I'm going to pay you for it."

The girl looked at him in wonder as he thrust his hand into a secret pocket inside his vest and drew out a roll of bills. From the roll he selected ten fifty-dollar bills.

"There, Mary, there's five hundred dollars for you," and he put the bills into her hand; "don't hesitate to take it; I can spare it well enough, and I've not done one-tenth part as much for you in the past as I ought to have done. This will purchase a little respite from toil for you, and you won't have to work those pretty little slender lady fingers to the bone."

"I would rather not take it," the girl said, slowly.

"Don't be alarmed, Mary, dear," Blaine said, reassuringly; "there's no blood upon the money."

The shrewd eyes of the escaped convict had detected the shudder which had thrilled through her form as he put the money into her hand, and he had guessed the reason.

Then Blaine rubbed his cheek carelessly against the smooth forehead of the girl.

"Don't think too bad of me, Mary. I'm bad enough, I know, but there are men in the world ten times worse than I am, and yet they hold their heads up in society and go to church every Sunday, and pray as if they were the best of Christians. You can take the money fearlessly; it was not ill-got, though the chances are that, if I keep it, it will be ill-gone. You may be sick, you know, and unable to work for a while, and if that should happen, why this little sum in the bank will keep the wolf from the door until you get well again."

"If you say that I must take it, I can not do else than obey you," the girl replied, humbly.

"Put it in your pocket then, right away," he said, and she obeyed him even with the word.

"That's right," he exclaimed, patting her head.

"Ah, Mary, if I had had a girl like you by my side when I first began my life-fight, I think that it would have made a different man of me. And that reminds me, my dear, there's something that I want to speak to you about."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

"MARRY HIM."

"Yes?" and Mary looked up in his face, as if to ask what that something was.

"That young girl that was here just now—"

"Chocolate!" said Mary, as he paused.

"Chocolate!" Is that her name?"

"No; her name is Mary, the same as my own; Mary Crofkin, but Chocolate is her nickname."

"Ah, yes, I understand," Blaine said.

"You need not fear!" Mary exclaimed, hastily.

"She gave me her promise before she went out that she would not tell anybody. She suspected there was some one concealed here."

"From what I overheard of the conversation between you two, I judged she had no suspicion that the person whom she guessed was concealed here was the escaped convict that the police were in search of."

"No; she did not suspect that."

"But she thought that the person was your lover?"

"Yes."

"I thought so," and then John Blaine was silent for a few minutes, evidently reflecting. "Mary, I overheard some part of the conversation," he said, suddenly; "and one sentence that the girl spoke I do not exactly understand."

"What was that?" Mary asked, vainly trying to remember what Chocolate had said.

"It was just after you got before the door and prevented her from coming in the bedroom. She reproached you with not acting rightly with her, and then added that you had not acted rightly with some one else either."

A crimson blush flooded the girl's face, and in confusion she bent down her head. Blaine's keen eyes instantly read there a confirmation of the suspicion which the outspoken declaration of Chocolate had created in his mind.

Passing his hand under the girl's chin, he lifted up her head so that he could look into her eyes, but the white lids, tightly closed, hid the gray-blue orbs from sight.

"So, so!" he ejaculated, meaningly; "my little girl has a lover, eh?" and then he released his hold upon the chin, and the shapely head sunk down again.

"Come, Mary, tell the truth," he said, coaxingly; "though I know I hardly need to say that, for I am sure if you speak you'll tell nothing but the truth. I am not at all vexed about it; why should I be? You are human, right in the spring of life, and with the warm blood of youth leaping lightly in your veins. It would be a miracle, indeed, if you should not find some one to love. I do not expect that the blight of my existence is to hang forever over your life. It would be better for you if you would forget that the world holds, or ever did hold, such a man as John Blaine."

"I would rather not speak," she said, slowly, her eyes downcast to the ground.

"My dear Mary, you must speak," he replied, firmly. "It is my right to know all the particulars of the affair. Who is the man—what's his name?"

"Carlisle Stewart," she replied, in a voice but little above a whisper.

"And who is he? Is he rich or poor?"

"Very rich, Chocolate says."

"Aha! that's good!" and John Blaine rubbed his hands together, gleefully. "And he loves you, eh?"

"He says so," she murmured, softly.

"And you love him?"

"Yes—I could not help it, and yet I struggled so long against it," she rejoined, low and plaintively.

"Why should you try to help it?" Blaine demanded.

"I—I thought of you," she murmured.

"You little goose!" he exclaimed; "John Blaine has been as one dead to you for years; but for this accidental meeting to-night, it is possible that we should never have encountered each other. But, to return to your lover. Has he asked you to marry him?"

"Yes."

"And you accepted!" Blaine exclaimed, perfectly satisfied that he had guessed the truth.

"No; I told him that I could not marry him," the girl said, slowly.

"The deuce you did!" he cried, in astonishment; "and why did you make that answer?"

"I knew that you were alive; and I had a presentiment that I should see you soon."

"My dear Mary, this is worse than childish folly!" he protested, impatiently; "I am nothing to you now, nor you to me. Forget the past, entirely; marry this man; he will make you happy. I will never trouble you. Only two persons in the world know the relationship existing between us, and those two are Mary Martin and John Blaine. I shall never speak of it, and you surely are wise enough to keep your own counsel. Come, you'll marry this fellow, won't you?" he asked, coaxingly.

The girl shook her head.

"And why not?"

"I would not deceive the man who loves me," she replied, firmly.

"Nonsense!" he exclaimed, fretfully, and an expression of vexation passed over his face; "you need not deceive him; all that you need to do is to hold your tongue. I will not speak, and no one else can beside yourself."

"The girl shook her head, but did not reply."

Blaine looked in the quiet face for a few minutes, and what he read there plainly revealed to him that no words of his would be powerful enough to alter the determination of the girl. The escaped felon had had some little experience with womankind during his sojourn on earth, and had fully learned, long years before, how fruitless it was to attempt, by argument, to change a woman's will.

"I hope that you will reconsider your determination some day," he said, quietly; "but, remember, whether you do or not, you have my free consent to marry the man that you love; and I promise you that I will never trouble you in any way."

"While you live I shall never marry," was the solemn rejoinder.

"Don't say that, my dear, or you'll be apt to make me think that you are waiting and wishing for my death." He spoke lightly; not a bit of seriousness in his manner. "And now, to come from the clouds of sentiment down to the earth of actual life, let me see how I must plan to avoid the hounds of the law, who have been so close at my heels. It will hardly do for me to venture abroad after this chase to-night, for every policeman in New York will be on the alert, and of course my present disguise is known. I think, my dear, that the best thing that I can possibly do is to stay here until the affair is partially forgotten. For two or three days the officers will be hot after me, but after that, discovering no fresh clew to my whereabouts, they will grow careless, relax in vigilance, and then I can probably manage to slip out of the city. There is no danger of their searching for me here again. Do you think that you can arrange it so that I can remain here for five or six days?"

"Yes, but I shall have to confide in Mary," the girl replied thoughtfully.

"Mary—that's Chocolate, that smart little thing, that was in here a little while ago?" he said.

"Yes."

"I can take possession of this room here," and Blaine pointed to the inner apartment. "The door can be kept closed, and no one except your roommate will think that there is any one here. I suppose Chocolate occupies the rooms with you?"

Mary nodded assent.

"I judged so from what I overheard of the conversation between you two. There is no need, you know, to tell the girl the exact truth about the matter," he said, thoughtfully.

"She is not at home at all in the daytime," Mary said; "she works down town—goes away in the morning and does not get home till night."

"That is good. She thinks that I am your lover, I believe?"

"Yes."

"Well, let her keep in that idea," Blaine remarked, reflectively; "I look too young to pass for your father, if by accident she should happen to catch a glimpse at me; and I am sure that she would not believe that I am your brother. The only bother is the reason for my remaining concealed here, for she is too sharp not to suspect something unless you give her a reasonable explanation. I have an idea!" he exclaimed, after a moment's thought; "you can tell her I was concerned in the disturbance down in New Orleans, and am afraid of an arrest by the military authorities. That will not seem like a crime to her."

And the escaped convict laughed as lightly as though a human bloodhound was not tracking his steps with relentless hate.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE LAWYER'S ADVICE.

ELBERT VAN TROMP was not altogether pleased with the way that affairs had gone with his cousin Ernestine and the suitor that he had presented, Captain Blackie; or, to speak more correctly, he did not like to see the love affair stand still as it was now doing, making no progress toward marriage.

He had questioned Blackie, and that gentleman had frankly described the situation. Ernestine had confessed that she loved him, but candidly said that there was a reason why she could not marry him at present.

And what that reason was, Elbert Van Tromp could not guess. The family secret, which the girl had alluded to in such a mysterious manner, was a complete puzzle to him. But then he reflected that before the past three years he had not been very intimate with his cousin, and he rightly guessed that the circumstances which had given rise to the family secret that prevented Ernestine from marrying the man she loved had occurred before that time.

Elbert had pondered long over the matter, and finally had come to the conclusion to question his

cousin and, if possible, ascertain the nature of the obstacle which prevented him taking possession of fifty thousand dollars. So he took an early opportunity to question Ernestine upon the subject.

Finding her alone in the library one morning after breakfast, he commenced operations.

In a delicate and diplomatic manner he hinted that he had noticed Blackie's attentions, and hoped that they were not displeasing to her.

Blushingly the girl admitted that they were not. Then, encouraged by this avowal, he proceeded to state how much he liked Blackie, and how much pleasure it would give him to see that gentleman united to her in marriage.

Ernestine blushed still more, but did not reply. And then a brilliant idea came to Elbert—and he at once proceeded to put it in operation.

"I think the match would be a very excellent one, although the gentleman is not rich," he said, slowly.

"I should not think of that for a moment, Elbert!" she exclaimed, quickly. "I have quite enough money, and I am sure that Mr. Blackie is actuated by pure motives and does not wish to marry me simply because I am wealthy."

"I fully agree with you, Ernestine," he said. "I am sure that if he was called upon to make his choice between the lady and the money, he would choose the first without a moment's hesitation."

Ernestine laughed. "I think so, although perhaps I flatter myself by the thought," she said.

"Oh, no!" he cried, quickly; and then he proceeded to develop his idea. "Ernestine, as I really feel very much interested in Blackie, possibly I am not exactly the proper person to advise you in this matter; therefore, suppose you consult old Mr. Edwards, the lawyer? He has always attended to all the law affairs of the family, and if there is any slight obstacle in the way which would seem to forbid your marriage with my friend, he can probably suggest some way to get over it."

Ernestine remained silent for quite a time, evidently deep in reflection; the little foot patted the floor gently and the pearly white teeth caressed the scarlet under lip; then with a decided movement, she raised her head, and the bright smile which came over her face convinced Elbert that she had received his suggestion favorably.

"You will go and ask Mr. Edwards's advice?"

"Yes; I will go down to his office this very morning," she replied. "I will dress at once," and she rose to leave the room.

"You act promptly," Elbert said, smiling. "By the way, I suppose it is hardly necessary to caution you, Ernestine, that Mr. Edwards is an old, cautious lawyer, and that, in all probability, the first idea he will get of Mr. Blackie is that he is a fortune-hunter who wishes to marry you for your money."

"Oh, I understand that," she replied, laughing. "I do not care for advice as to the kind of a husband I should choose. I think the natural wit our sex is supposed to be gifted with is quite sufficient for that," and then she passed out of the room.

"Aha!" muttered Van Tromp, rubbing his hands together with an air of satisfaction; "let a woman in love alone to find a way to reach her lover. Sooner or later she would have thought of the old lawyer herself and sought him for advice."

In an hour after the conversation between the two, Ernestine was in the office of Mr. Edwards.

The lawyer was a portly, well-preserved old gentleman, with a cheery smile, and a bluff, hearty way. Ernestine had always been a great favorite with this man of the law, he having known her from childhood.

Ernestine hardly knew how to begin the conversation, but after a few trivial remarks, set her little red lips together for a moment, like a high-blooded filly taking the bit between her teeth preparatory to a runaway, then proceeded at once to explain the nature of her business.

She had barely said twenty words when the old gentleman interrupted her.

"I know all about it, my dear!" he said, pursing up his mouth. "I had the whole management of the affair."

"Why, I did not know—" the girl cried, in astonishment, but the old lawyer again interrupted her.

"Of course not, my dear!" he exclaimed, quickly; "how should you know? You thought that your mother arranged it; but, my dear, your mother couldn't handle Mr. John Blaine. And so you have seen him, eh?"

The girl nodded assent.

"He has broken the bargain, then, for he accepted a certain sum of money and bound himself never to trouble you. I might have expected it, though—the rascal!" the old man said with an air of vexation; and then he saw the girl's lips quiver and a soft, reproachful look in her eyes.

"I really beg your pardon, my dear child," he said, hastily. "I forgot how deeply you are interested in him, or I should not have spoken my mind so freely; I don't wish to wound your feelings. And now, my child, to come right to the point: as John Blaine has come to you, I suppose that he is trying to exert some authority over you, eh?"

"No, not yet; but I fear that in the future he may," the girl replied slowly. "I must explain the whole matter to you fully, so that you may understand. I have lately become acquainted with a gentleman who is very agreeable to me, and—" The girl hesitated, not knowing exactly how to express her meaning, and the cunning old lawyer, who had read in her blushing face what she wished to say, came to her assistance.

"And at some time in the future this gentleman may wish to marry you, and as he is agreeable"—the old man laughed as he repeated the word she had used, laying a great stress upon it—"you might wish to say yes to the soft question, if a certain man called John Blaine did not exist."

Smiling amid her blushes, Ernestine signified that the lawyer had correctly stated the case.

"Go ahead and marry him if you want to, my dear," said the old gentleman, carelessly.

"But—" "But John Blaine, eh?"

"Yes."

"He won't trouble you," the lawyer said, decidedly. "Why, if this fellow should dare to appear so that I could get hold of him, I'd lock him up in the State Prison. I've a forgery case hanging over his

head. That is the way I beat him in the first place. He was fool enough to fall into a trap I laid for him. He would never have consented to have let you alone, if I hadn't had a rod in pickle for him. This fellow will hardly dare to show his face openly, anyway, for the police are on his track now."

"But if he should communicate with my husband, supposing that I should marry, and tell him all the particulars?" she queried.

"Well, he might do that," the lawyer remarked, thoughtfully.

"And then think how terrible it would be for me."

"Well, that would depend a great deal upon what kind of a husband you had," was the considerate reply. "Don't you think that the gentleman will love you well enough to look over it, particularly when I can produce a certain legal document which can prove conclusively to any one that this man, John Blaine, has really no more authority over you now than the person popularly known in fable as the man in the moon?"

"And you have that paper?" asked the girl, catching eagerly at the hope.

"Of course I have, my dear," replied the lawyer, with a shrewd smile. "Not a single red cent would I pay the fellow until he agreed to it, and, besides, I hold the forgery charge over his head."

Ernestine's face brightened up at these cheering words, and she arose to depart.

"By the by, my dear!" cried the lawyer, abruptly, rising as he spoke, "you had better not say anything about the affair to any one, not even to the gentleman; the chances are that he will never know anything about it unless you make the confession, and it is just as well that you should be silent about the matter."

"But will that be acting rightly with him?" she asked, doubtfully.

"Certainly; don't you imagine that there may be some little secret on his part, too?" he shrewdly asked. "Well, good-by; send me an invitation to the wedding."

Ernestine departed, feeling much lighter at heart.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

A WHITE SLAVE.

ABOUT four o'clock on the afternoon of the day of the interview between the old lawyer and Ernestine, Mr. Gorman O'Shane entered the Hoffman House for the purpose of calling upon the diamond beauty, Rosaline Ameston; but, as the Irishman passed through the office of the hotel on his way to the stairs, he was disgusted to behold the man in gray, Campbell, lazily reclining upon one of the cushioned seats, smoking a cigar.

"The dirty blaggard!" muttered O'Shane, in supreme contempt, involuntarily coming to a full stop; but then, in an instant he recovered himself and proceeded onward.

"Bad 'cess to him! Can't I go anywhere widout seein' that thafe of the world? Bedad! if it keeps on, I shall have to cut his throat or mine the first thing I know. What does he want wid me at all, at all?"

When O'Shane knocked at the door of Rosaline's room, the clear voice of the girl bade him enter.

"The top of the morning to ye, me jewel!" O'Shane exclaimed, gallantly, as he entered the room and closed the door behind him.

The girl, attired in a loose wrapper, was seated in an easy-chair by the window, reading. She raised her head as O'Shane entered.

"Ah, is that you, Mr. O'Shane?" she said, languidly.

"Yis, me darlint; don't rise, I beg of ye," he replied, laying aside his hat and coat, and helping himself to a chair, which he drew up near to the girl's side. "Yis, me jewel, it's me," he repeated, "as large as life and twice as unnatural. And how is me beauty to-day? Sure you're not looking as well as usual."

"I am not very well," she responded.

"And what's the matter, me darlint? are ye sick?"

To do the Irishman justice, he really felt a great interest in the girl, and that was strange, too, for she was about the only being in the world that he cared two straws for.

"No, only sick at heart; that's all," answered Rosaline, wearily.

"And why should ye be sick at heart, dear?" he asked, soothingly. "Sure it's a fine, beautiful girl ye are, wid yer brilliant, bright eyes, and yer walk like a natural-born queen. Ye ought to be dining on dew-drops, and rose-leaves and the world's before ye like a fairy palace."

"Very unsubstantial diet," she said, slowly, a half-smile creeping over her beautiful face; "the fairy palace, too, would melt into thin air, if I dared to attempt to enter it, I am afraid."

"What makes ye spake so bitterly, me jewel?" queried O'Shane, in wonder.

"Because I feel bitter, I suppose," returned the girl, half-closing her eyes, and letting her head sink back in the hollow of the cushioned chair, with a listless air.

"And why should ye feel in that way, Rosy, me darlint?" he demanded. "Sure, you are living like a queen now in a grand hotel, and maybe ye can remember the time when it was mighty poor quarters that held ye. Bedad! when they take the diamond out of lead and set it in gold, it ought to feel better."

"Your simile is bad," said the girl; "say rather that the diamond is happier in its native sand than when, in obedience to the world's demands, the graver's tool robs it of half its being. You think that I ought to be happy because fortune apparently smiles upon me."

"Apparently!" cried the Irishman. "Faix, them diamonds look to me like sparklers."

"And do diamonds and good fortune always bring happiness?" she asked, raising her head, with a scornful air.

"Well, I don't say that; but it's mighty comfortable to have 'em."

"It depends altogether on the price that you have to pay for them," and her lips curled as she spoke.

"Sure, I'd like to ax ye what price you paid for your fortune, Rosy, dear, but maybe ye think that I'm impudent," O'Shane said, slyly.

"I did not pay much, and yet I gave all that I had in the world," she answered. "I gave myself. For the sake of wealth I gave my hand to a man almost old enough to be—not my father—but my grandfather."

"Oh, murder and turf!" exclaimed O'Shane, in utter dismay; "you have been married, then?"

"Yes."

"Sure, I wouldn't have belaved it if ye hadn't 'a' said so yourself; and where's yer husband?"

"Dead," replied the girl, coldly; "he died in a year after we were married."

"And he left his property to ye, I suppose?"

"Yes, he was a wealthy creole from Louisiana, a Frenchman by birth, a monster I hated from the first moment that I saw him." The girl's face was scornful, and her tone full of bitterness.

"And yet ye married him?" O'Shane demanded.

"Yes, simply married him because he was wealthy, and because he was old, and I knew that the slavery would not be very long, even though it might be galling. Think what a worthless, heartless creature I was to calculate so shrewdly upon the death of the man whom I had sworn before the altar to love, honor, cherish and obey."

"Oh, faix!" cried the Irishman, quickly, "there's plenty of angels marry devils wid jist such ideas. That's common, me darlint, when youth and beauty are on the wan side, and old age and gould on the other."

"And yet I should not have done so—could not have endured the bitter gall of my slavery—but for one thing!" exclaimed the girl, with a sudden, fierce energy, which lit up her pale face and made her dark eyes blaze.

"And what was that, darlint?" asked O'Shane, in wonder.

"I loved a man as poor as myself; fate chose to separate us for a time, but I cherished the hope within my heart that some day we should meet again, and then, with the wealth purchased by my slavery, I could make him happy. And glowing in that thought I endured the hourly contact with my master, whom I hated, as only a woman can hate a man who takes the place of the one she loves and whose touch she is forced to submit. Patiently and without a word of complaint I fulfilled my part of the contract, and was to him a true and dutiful wife if not a loving one. The day of my redemption came at last. I could not shed a tear, for my heart was full of joy, and it would have been but hollow mockery. And then I set out to find the man for whose sake I had done what few women would have dared to do. At last I found him and—and you know the rest."

The girl's head sunk back in the chair, and the weary eyes—weary of the world and all mankind—closed, as though by the act she would drive away the mocking phantoms of despair which her memory had conjured up.

"It's that devil, Blackie, she loves," murmured O'Shane. "Oh, tare and ouns! why did I mix myself up in the affair at all? I say, Rosy," and he raised his voice as he called to the girl. "Did ye know that Captain Blackie is going to marry Miss Ernestine Van Tromp in about two months?"

"I supposed that he would marry her soon, the girl replied, still keeping her eyes shut. The news did not affect her, for she was prepared to hear it. Only when she thought of the past, of the terrible slavery she had endured for his sake, did the fountain of bitterness in her heart overflow and find vent in burning words.

"I was up there this afternoon, and Van Tromp told me. It was only settled to-day, I believe."

"If he loves her and she loves him, the quicker they are married the better," she said, decidedly.

O'Shane looked at her in astonishment; he had expected that the news would have agitated her somewhat, but had resolved to tell it to her, knowing that sooner or later she would hear it.

"Faix, I don't understand yer nature at all!" he exclaimed, perplexed. "I shouldn't think that ye'd like to have Blackie marry this girl."

"Why not?" she demanded, raising her head and looking him full in the face. "Do I not desire his happiness?"

"Sure, don't you want him yerself?"

"No if he loves another woman," was the decided reply. "How could I be happy with him unless his heart were all mine?"

This staggered the Irishman; his dull soul could not comprehend the subtle fineness of the girl's nature.

"Well, by-by, Rosy," he said, as he rose to go; "I begin to believe that there's wan angel in the world, after all."

Then he departed, and Rosaline was left alone.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

O'SHANE CORNERED.

O'SHANE descended the stairs, his mind full of wonder. The girl was a most decided puzzle to him.

"I can't understand it at all, at all," he muttered. "She loves him, and she gives him up aisy. Faix! if I loved a girl, devil a bit would I give her up. If Rosy had lived in the olden time it's a saint that they'd made of her, bedad."

Passing through the office, the Irishman looked around for the man in gray, but to his great relief he could not discover him.

"The blaggard!" he muttered, as he stood for a moment on the steps of the hotel, looking at the crowd passing by. "He makes me sick, the villain, whenever I lay me two eyes upon him. What does he want for to follow at my heels like me shadow, I'd like to know? Sorra a rap I owe the spalpeen, that I know of."

Then O'Shane left the hotel steps, and joining the crowd, sauntered up Broadway.

But as he went on up the street, continually his thoughts would return to the mysterious man in gray.

"Bad 'cess to him!" muttered the Irishman, impatiently; "it's dr'aming I'll be of him next. Sure, I can't set foot in the street but that I expect, every time I look round, to see him behind me." As he spoke, O'Shane glanced nervously over his shoulder, and to his horror, he discovered the man in gray some twenty paces down the street, lounging very leisurely behind him.

"Oh! the curse of Cromwell on him!" ejaculated the Irishman, in a rage; "it's after me ag'in he is. Bedad, I'll lead him a foine wild-geese chase this time."

And acting on the idea, O'Shane increased his pace and walked briskly up the street; and as he

went on, he took occasion every now and then to glance cautiously behind him. As he had expected, the man in gray was on his track.

On the corner of Forty-second street O'Shane halted for a moment; then, as he took another look behind him and saw the man in gray apparently very much engaged in looking into a shop window, a sudden idea flashed into his mind.

"Bedad! that will bother the blagg'ard!" he exclaimed, in glee, as he rapped his switch smartly against the leg of his pantaloons. "I'll go down to the ferry, and cross the river to Weehawken, and trate him to a walk on the hills beyant. It's foine bracing weather, and maybe the country air will be good for his health."

Acting on this thought, O'Shane turned down Forty-second street and proceeded toward the river; and after he had gone on a block or so, he gave a cautious glance behind, and, sure enough, the man in gray was after him.

O'Shane chuckled a bit to himself as he walked on, but there was very little merriment in his heart. Changing the light came into his left hand, the Irishman thrust the other into a pocket in the breast of his overcoat, where a small revolver was concealed. O'Shane had armed himself since he had discovered that his footsteps were almost constantly followed by the man in gray.

"If I can get the villain in a nate place on the other side of the river, bedad, I'll make him tell me what he manes by dogging me as if I was a dirty pickpocket, bad 'cess to him!" he muttered, and he smiled grimly to himself as his hand tightly grasped the butt of the weapon.

Straight down the street to the ferry went the Irishman, and carelessly following in his track, without apparently taking any particular notice of him, came the Virginian, Campbell.

The two both went on the same little ferry-boat. The boat crossed the river and discharged its living cargo on the Weehawken side.

There were very few passengers, and O'Shane was one of the first to land, and his long legs carried him briskly up the hill, while, steadily behind him, a hundred paces or so in the rear, came the Virginian.

If one could judge by the face and manner of the man in gray, he had not the slightest suspicion that the Irishman was leading him off on a wild-goose chase.

Arriving at the top of the hill, O'Shane struck off to the left on a sort of a country road, and when Campbell came to the corner, he also turned to the left.

O'Shane walked on briskly, and then, glancing carelessly behind him, discovered that he and the man in gray were in solitary possession of the lonely road.

"It's about time, I think, for me to astonish this blagg'ard's weak nerves," O'Shane muttered, with a grin, as he again thrust his hand into his breast and grasped the butt of his revolver.

Not a soul in sight on the road except the two men—the pursued and the pursuer.

O'Shane slackened his pace, the man in gray did the same. The Irishman went slower and slower, so did the other, until at last O'Shane drew the revolver from his breast and wheeled suddenly around.

The smile of triumph which had illuminated the face of O'Shane as he faced about faded into a look of mingled rage and astonishment as he found himself "covered" by a heavy navy revolver in the hands of the man in gray, leveled full at his breast.

"Drop your weapon!" cried the Virginian, sternly.

A moment O'Shane hesitated, but his weapon was in his hand at the level of his waist and uncocked, while he could see that the "hammer" of the other's revolver was drawn back and needed but the pressure of his finger upon the trigger to bring it down upon the cartridge and drive the ball through his breast.

The Irishman was no coward, but he was taken at a disadvantage, and fully realized how utterly useless resistance would be.

So down went the revolver to the ground, and Campbell approached slowly until he was within a dozen paces of O'Shane.

"Caught in your own trap, I fancy," the Virginian said dryly, as he surveyed the discomfited Irishman.

"If you will have the kindness to explain what the devil ye mane by all this, it's mighty obliged I'll be," said O'Shane, with overpowering politeness.

"Why did you draw a weapon on me just now?" demanded the Virginian.

"Why do you foller me about like as if ye war my shadow?" was O'Shane's indignant rejoinder.

"Because I want you to lead me to the lion whose jackal you are," answered Campbell, sternly.

"Is it me that's a jackal?" cried O'Shane, in rage, that even the revolver pointed at his breast could not subdue. "Sorra a bit of a jackal am I!"

"It's no use to lie to me!" cried Campbell, sternly; "I know the truth. You led me to him once, but he managed to give me the slip. Now tell me where he is hid."

O'Shane looked at the Virginian in astonishment. "By Saint Patrick! it's mad he is!" he muttered to himself, in alarm.

"Come, answer; don't take time to hatch a lie!" cried Campbell, roughly; "you know who I mean well enough. I tracked you when you went to meet him at that house in Madison avenue."

"Is it Elbert Van Tromp you mane?" asked O'Shane, utterly bewildered.

"No; you know well enough who I want—John Blaine."

"Is it John Blaine?" O'Shane asked, innocently.

"You know it is!" Campbell cried, fiercely. "Come, I'm losing patience. Tell me where John Blaine is concealed before I get through counting ten, or you're a dead man on the instant!" and then Campbell began to count slowly.

O'Shane gazed at him like one stupefied; his mouth was agape with wonder, and his eyes extended to almost double their usual size.

"Seven—eight—nine—" counted Campbell, implacable as grim death, and then suddenly O'Shane realized the danger of his position. Down on his knees he went on the snowy road with a hand extended to heaven.

"Hold on wid ye, till ye hear me swear!" he cried. "I'm a good Christian, and I've got a soul to lose, and I'd rather lose my life than risk my soul by taking a false oath. By him that died to save all us

poor sinners, I swear that I don't know where John Blaine is, more than the babe unborn."

Just a single instant Campbell glanced into the earnest face of the Irishman, and then he was fully satisfied that he had spoken the truth.

O'Shane rose slowly to his feet.

"I spake the truth, and if you don't believe me, take me to a priest and I'll swear it before the altar; sure I wouldn't take an oath like that to a lie; it's cursed I'd be forever."

"Lost! lost again!" Campbell murmured wildly, and then, without paying any more attention to the Irishman, he rushed hastily up the road in the direction of the ferry.

O'Shane, motionless, watched him until he disappeared out of sight.

"It's crazy he is, I'm sure," he muttered, and then he, too, walked slowly up the road. "What will Rosy say when I tell her this?"

CHAPTER XL.

THE JEW PEDDLER.

CAMPBELL came back to the city like a man distracted. He was perfectly satisfied that the Irishman had spoken the truth, and that in reality he knew nothing of the whereabouts of the escaped convict.

"It was all accident then; I stumbled upon John Blaine and did not hunt him down by skillful tracking," he muttered, as he walked up Forty-second street toward Broadway. "How shall I strike upon his track again? By what miracle did he escape from me last night?"

Then Campbell fell to reviewing the circumstances. "And that girl's face in the big barracks," he muttered. "I feel sure that I know the eyes. I felt a cold shiver go all over me when I saw them. Twenty years ago I was chilled to the heart, by a pair of eyes like them, and I have never got over it."

Then suddenly he started and thumped his fist violently against his forehead.

"Oh! what an idiot I am!" he cried, aloud, forgetting, for the moment, that he was in the public street. "The hunted beast always doubles on its track, and this man when hard pressed has always done the same. When I hunted him from the steamboat, he went straight back to the house in Madison avenue. Aha! I'll have him yet!"

And, with his face lit up by the newly awakened fires of hate, Campbell hurried up the street.

The human bloodhound was, indeed, tireless on the scent.

The gad has just been lit in the entry of the tenement-house, although it was barely half-past five, but the darkness had come on early, and the leaden clouds overshadowing the sky threatened a snow-storm.

Within the little apartments occupied by the two Marys were the spiritual-looking girl, so beautiful in her intense sorrow, and the cold, heartless adventurer, reckless John Blaine.

The girl was busy in the kitchen, seated by the table, on which was placed a kerosene lamp, sewing steadily on the shirts destined for her lover, and many a tear came unbidden from her eyes at thought of the hopeless passion that had grown up within her breast, and of the dream of bliss from which John Blaine's handsome face had so suddenly roused her.

And Blaine himself, extended at full length on the little sofa in the inner room, was gazing through the window upon the gathering darkness without. Framed in the murky gloom of the night John Blaine saw three faces, and back again to his mind came old-time memories.

"Three girls have loved me passing well, and each one of the three wrecked her life's happiness for my sake," he mused. "Come back, old love scenes, and thrill my heart as in the old time, when soft white arms twined tightly round me, and full ripe lips lifted, red-curved, to woo my soul to passion's dream of paradise. Ah," he murmured, sadly, "my spell fails me and my heart grows cold. I fear some danger near."

And even as he murmured of a coming peril, a knock sounded on the door leading into the hall.

Mary looked up from her sewing and Blaine bounded to his feet, nimble and light as a cat, and laid his hand upon the butt of his revolver.

The girl, looking at the door, saw a dark figure shadowed upon the ground glass. There was little cause for alarm. The knock was low and gentle, not like the sturdy thump of a police officer.

"Who is it, I wonder?" Blaine said, in a cautious whisper, coming to the door between the two rooms.

"I think it is a peddler," Mary replied. As the man stood half-sideways, shadowed upon the door, the girl thought that she could detect from the outline of the shadow that the man had a pack on his back.

"You had better go to the door and see what he wants. That will be the easiest way to get rid of him," Blaine commanded, and then retired into the inner room and closed the door after him.

Mary put down her work and went to the door. As she turned the key in the lock, the stranger boldly opened the door and pushed his way in, in spite of the girl's effort to prevent him. As Mary had guessed, it was a peddler. He was wrapped up to the throat in a great white coat, and had a huge muffler tied round his neck; the broad-brimmed hat which was pulled down over his eyes showed some few snowflakes, testifying that the storm had already begun. He carried a large basket on his arm, filled with various little articles, and had quite a large pack slung on his shoulders.

"Can I sell you some t'ings, ma tear?" said the man, persuasively, and the strong accent betrayed that he was a Jew.

"No, I do not wish anything," replied the young seamstress, who had turned deadly pale at first when the man had insisted upon coming in, but upon discovering what and who he was, had recovered from her fright.

"I sell very sheap," he answered, unslinging his pack from his shoulder and putting it on the floor much to the girl's alarm.

"No, no! I tell you that I do not wish to purchase anything at all!" she answered, quite sternly.

"I sell very sheap, indeed, nice t'ings too; shust look, ma tear!" and he knelt down and proceeded to undo the pack.

"But I cannot buy anything; I haven't any money!" exclaimed Mary, beginning to perceive that

she was going to have a difficult task to get rid of the intruder unless she consented to examine his wares.

"No money!" and the Jew chuckled. "That is shust what de ladies always say. Wait till you see mine goots; den you will buy, I am sure."

Then he proceeded to spread out some dress patterns on the floor. The girl with an air of resignation leaned against the table. She had come to the conclusion that the quickest way to get rid of him would be to let him have his own way.

"Dat will make you a splendid dress, ma tear!" the peddler exclaimed, as he exhibited a bright plaid of scarlet and green.

"I do not wish it,"

"Dis is nice, too," and he displayed another dress pattern.

"I do not wish anything at all, sir," Mary said, impatiently. "I tell you again I have no money. You might as well take your goods and go somewhere else. You cannot sell anything here."

"You don't want to buy, eh?" The peddler apparently was astonished.

"No; I told you so when you first came in!" Mary was beginning to get impatient.

"But I sell you as sheap as never vas, ma tear," remonstrated the Jew.

"I do not wish anything at all, and you will please go out; you are keeping me from my work," Mary said, quite angry at the persistence of the man.

"Vat you work at, eh?" he asked, getting up from the floor. "Shust show me, and we may make a goot trade."

And as he spoke, he advanced toward the table where the girl's work lay.

Just a little bit alarmed at the man's manner, Mary moved so as to get between him and the door of the inner room; she was afraid that the inquisitive intruder would take it into his head to look in there and thus discover the concealed man.

"Oh, mine gootness, vat nice shirts!" exclaimed the Jew, in admiration, and with uplifted hands. "I gifes you nine shillings, ma tear, for von of dem."

"They are not for sale, sir, and I wish you would go about your business at once!" Mary cried, spiritedly.

"Now, you ish mad! So help me gracious! I gifes you ten shillings for one of dem!" he exclaimed.

"No, sir; I don't wish to sell them," Mary replied, "and if you don't go away at once, I shall call upon the people in next room to come and put you out!"

"Mine gootness!" exclaimed the Jew, apparently in great astonishment, "you ish the maddest girl vat ever vash! Now I makes you one goot offer; I gifes you von dress-pattern for one of dem shirts."

"No, sir!" cried Mary, indignantly. "Now, if you don't go, I'll call for help."

"Oh, I go right away now," he said, cringingly; "can I go down by de back way dere?"

And, as he spoke, he advanced toward the door before which Mary stood.

"There is no back way here!" she cried, in alarm, "and you must go out the same way you came in."

A moment the Jew stood motionless, his head bent down. At first Mary was puzzled, but then, all at once it flashed upon her that the man was listening, but, before she could act upon the thought, the Jew suddenly caught her by the shoulders and hurled her away from the door.

CHAPTER XLI.

A TERRIBLE AFFRAY.

THE movement upon the part of the Jew was so sudden and unexpected, that Mary could offer no resistance; besides she was but as a child in the strong grasp of the peddler.

Mary went reeling across the room to the wall, and only for that support she would have fallen. Then, with a sudden, powerful kick, the Jew dashed in the door leading to the inner room, and there, revolver in hand, stood John Blaine.

He had guessed the danger that threatened him, and stood like a wolf at bay.

The hammer of the revolver fell, the flash followed, and then the bullet tore through the flesh of the Jew's side; but the aim of Blaine was not altogether true, taken by surprise as he had been, and the thick coat of his assailant deadened the force of the ball.

With an oath, John Blaine jumped backward as he saw that he had not disabled the Jew, and attempted to bring the revolver again to bear, but the Jew, with a dexterous kick, sent the pistol spinning up into the air, and then, with all the force of his muscular arm, he struck Blaine a terrible blow in the throat, which sent him reeling backward against the wall, half-stunned.

Drawing a pair of handcuffs from his pocket, the Jew sprang them upon the wrists of the almost helpless man, and John Blaine was again a prisoner.

The hat of the Jew had fallen off during the struggle, the large muffler had been displaced from the throat; and, as he turned about and faced Mary, the girl, to her surprise, recognized the man who had searched the rooms in chase of the escaped convict the night before.

It was Campbell, the Virginian!

Then from his pocket the man-hunter drew a revolver, as though he feared that the girl might attempt to rescue his prisoner.

But, the girl, pale and agitated, could only weep.

In a second or so, Blaine realized the danger of his position; he rushed upon the Virginian, and, raising his manacled hands, strove to fell him to the ground; deftly the man-hunter stepped to one side, and extending his foot, tripped Blaine up, and tumbled him heavily to the floor.

Then the door of the apartment leading into the entry was opened suddenly, and a policeman entered. He had evidently been in waiting on the stairs below, and had been warned by the revolver-shot that the capture had been made.

Blaine rose slowly to his feet, his face black with rage.

"Aha!" cried the officer, in glee, "you did trap the bird, didn't you?"

"I'll be even with you some day for this," hissed Blaine, between his clenched teeth.

"You'll have to wait until you get out of Sing-Sing prison again before you get a chance for that," Campbell retorted.

Blaine ground his teeth in anger; he felt that he was helpless in the power of his enemies.

"Will you let me say a few words to the girl alone?" he asked, sullenly.

"No," Campbell replied, promptly.

Blaine looked at him for a moment scornfully.

"I did not speak to you, you cursed spy, but to this gentleman," and he turned to the officer.

"Can't do it, my pippin," returned the policeman, decidedly: "taint according to Hoyle. Prisoners can't be allowed private communications."

"You shan't beat me, curse you!" cried Blaine, angrily, then he turned to the girl. "Mary, do you know where the Hoffman House is on Broadway?"

"Yes," the girl replied.

"Go there at once; ask for Miss Rosaline Ameston, and tell her that I have been arrested and wish to see her. Don't forget the name—Miss Rosaline Ameston."

"I will not forget," replied the seamstress.

"Come along," ordered the policeman; "we've got to be moving."

"Will you allow me to put on my overcoat?" Blaine asked.

The policeman glanced at Campbell; he evidently looked upon the Virginian as commander-in-chief of the expedition.

Campbell nodded, so the policeman brought Blaine's overcoat. The Virginian unlocked the handcuffs, but stood ready to spring upon his prisoner if he should make the slightest movement tending to an escape.

Blaine noticed the precaution and a scornful smile came over his face.

The policeman helped Blaine on with his overcoat, then the handcuffs were replaced, and the officer moved to the door.

"Good-by, Mary," Blaine said, carelessly, as he passed out.

Campbell walked behind the prisoner, while the officer led the way. The Virginian cast an anxious and earnest glance into the face of the girl. Mary was strangely puzzled at the look.

Down the narrow stairs the little procession filed, until at last they passed through the lower entry-way into the street.

As the officer went through the front door he swung it back, and the Virginian caught it and held it open until the prisoner in the center could pass through.

The policeman had descended some four steps down, and the Virginian had just closed the door, when suddenly Blaine sprang forward, and dealt the officer a terrible blow on the back of the neck, which sent that worthy gentleman down the steps, across the sidewalk, reeling into the gutter in a twinkling. More stars flashed across that officer's vision in that single second than he had ever seen before in all his life.

Blaine had managed to slip his slender hands through the handcuffs.

After giving the officer the terrific blow, he made but one jump from the steps to the pavement, and turned to flee, but like a panther darting from the pendent bough, the Virginian leaped from the top of the steps down upon him.

The force of the shock hurled both of the two across the sidewalk into the gutter right on top of the policeman, whose first dim thought was that the side of the house had fallen in upon him.

Over and over, in a deadly grapple, the two rolled. Blaine succeeded in getting Campbell by the throat, and dashed his head with terrible force against the side of the gutter, with intent to make him loose his hold, but though the blood crimsoned the bronzed face of Campbell, still with a gripe like to the death-hold of the bull-dog, he clung to his foe.

The two in their desperate struggle had rolled off the prostrate body of the policeman, and that gentleman rising, came to the assistance of Campbell, and ended the struggle between the two by giving Blaine a most unmerciful whack over the head with his club, which straightened the escaped convict out as senseless as a log.

The officer raised his hand to repeat the blow—his head still ached from the terrible thump he had received from Blaine, and he longed to get "square" with the man who had so unexpectedly "lifted" him from the steps to the gutter—but he happened to glance into the face of Blaine, and saw that he was stunned.

Campbell struggled up, and sat on the edge of the curbstone, and began to wipe the blood from his face.

Quite a crowd had collected around by this time, and the officer fearing that Blaine might recover, and attempt again to escape, called loudly for a hack.

A carriage happened to be passing at that very moment, and the driver had pulled up, attracted by the crowd, with intent to discover what was the matter.

Hearing the policeman's call for a hack, the driver pushed his way through the crowd, and announced that his coach was at the officer's service.

"Just give me a hand here, Johnny, will ye," the policeman asked, as he stooped to pick up Blaine. The driver willingly assisted, and the two placed Blaine in the coach. He was still insensible from the tap on the head that he had received.

Then the officer looked around and found that Campbell was missing. Pushing his way back through the crowd, he discovered the Virginian still sitting upon the edge of the curbstone, apparently pretty badly hurt; he was breathing very hard, and seemed almost insensible as to what was going on around him.

With the assistance of one of the bystanders the officer put Campbell in the coach, then got in himself, and directed the coachman to drive at once to the Tombs.

"Pretty well played out all three on us," the officer remarked, reflectively, as the coach drove on.

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE VIRGINIAN'S LAST BLOW.

"Is'rose I had better report the affair at headquarters," the officer said aloud, as the coach proceeded on its way; and acting on the thought, he hailed the driver and directed him to go first to the Central Station.

The officer had placed the senseless form of Blaine on the back seat, and Campbell on the front seat with him.

It was evident to the officer that Campbell was pretty badly hurt, as he was almost insensible, and

every now and then the jolting of the carriage would force a deep groan of pain from him.

Then the officer turned his attention to Blaine.

"I hope I haven't killed the cuss!" muttered the policeman, as he bent over to examine his prisoner, and he thrust his hand into Blaine's breast to detect whether the action of the heart had stopped or not.

But the policeman was speedily convinced that Blaine was still alive.

"I knew that I hit him a smartish clip on the head, but I thought that it wasn't hard enough to crack his skull," the officer was musing, aloud. "He must have had a tough wrestle with this other chap; his shirt is wet through with perspiration," he murmured, as he withdrew his hand from John Blaine's breast.

Then he happened to glance at his palm, and to his astonishment he saw that his hand was stained with blood. The carriage was proceeding down Broadway, and he could distinguish the blood plainly by the light of gas-lamps.

"Thunder! 'tain't sweat!" cried the policeman, in amazement. "It's blood! He's cut for sure!"

Then he rapidly unfastened Blaine's coat and vest. As he had suspected, the shirt was stained with blood, and a little slit in the garment betrayed the place where the knife-thrust had pierced the flesh.

All was plain to the policeman now.

"When he had this fellow by the throat and was bumping his head ag'in' the curbstone, he jest put a knife into him. It was lucky for Blaine that I did hit him a tap on the head and roll him over or this fellow would have killed him, sure. I reckon that neither of them will ever be worth much in this world any more."

The policeman endeavored to stay the flow of blood which was streaming from the wound, and in a few minutes the coach drew up at the Central Police Station.

One of the police surgeons examined Blaine's wound. In his opinion it was not dangerous, and he got in the coach, and a half an hour afterward, both Blaine and Campbell occupied apartments in the well known prison, commonly styled the Tombs.

There, Campbell's case received attention. At first the surgeon was disposed to think that he had received but a trifling injury, and would soon get over it, but after a half-hour or so the Virginian grew rapidly worse and worse, became delirious, raved wildly and required half a dozen to hold him in bed; and just as the doctor had made up his mind to have him removed to the hospital as soon as possible, he suddenly grew calm, and then, turning gently on his side, drew a long breath and died.

The death came so sudden and unexpected, that all the watchers by the bedside were astounded.

And when the men by the side of the dead body fully realized the truth, ominously they shook their heads, and muttered:

"It's bad for John Blaine."

The Virginian dead was likely to cause him as much if not more trouble than the Virginian living.

And John Blaine, in the narrow confines of his cell, shuddered when he heard of the death of his foe.

No longer gloomy prison life in Sing-Sing stared him in the face, but a trial for murder with the gallows in prospective.

Little wonder that John Blaine was sick at heart, and that the icy chill of death's touch seemed already upon his temple.

Work now for his cunning brain. The Virginian dying had woven around him a more powerful snare than had ever been woven by him in life.

A terrible night John Blaine passed.

As early as possible in the morning he had dispatched a note to Ernestine Van Tromp, requesting her to call upon him at once.

"These women must save me!" he muttered, over and over again, as he lay upon his narrow cot and chafed like a caged lion as he saw how closely the net was drawing around him.

Wearily he waited for his guardian angels to come.

"Rosaline and Ernestine must pull me through this time," he muttered. "Mary, poor child, can do nothing here."

Then at last one of the keepers announced a visitor.

Eagerly, Blaine half-rose in his bed as the cell door opened to admit the visitor, but neither the gray-blue eyes of Rosaline nor the golden hair of Ernestine Van Tromp met his eyes. With a hollow groan he sunk back on his bed. The visitor was old Mr. Edwards, the lawyer!

A peculiar expression passed over the face of the old lawyer as he noticed the disappointment so plainly written on John Blaine's face.

"You're in close quarters, John Blaine," the lawyer said, glancing around him.

"Do you come here to tell me that?" muttered the convict, sullenly.

"Oh, no," replied the old gentleman, placidly; "I come to give you a little information which may be of service."

"From what I know of you in the past, I am not likely to believe that you will do me any service if you can help yourself," Blaine observed, bitterly.

"You are quite right," returned Edwards, coolly. "I am not in the habit of serving rascals if I can help it, even if am a lawyer."

"Do you come here to taunt me because I am a helpless prisoner?" asked Blaine, fiercely.

"I wouldn't come within ten miles of you if I could avoid it," replied the lawyer, "but now we'll drop this discussion and come to business. You sent a note to Miss Ernestine Van Tromp this morning?"

"I would not have believed that she would show it to you!" cried Blaine, in anger.

"Neither did she," said the lawyer, calmly. "By the merest accident in the world, I happened to be in the house waiting to see the young lady when your messenger arrived, and the note was given to me to give to her. I knew your handwriting—I've a wonderful memory you see—so I took the liberty to open your letter and read it."

"Oh, you infernal scoundrel!" cried Blaine, in rage, rising up in his bed.

"Come, come!" exclaimed the lawyer, impatiently; "you are altogether too old a man to give way to these childish fits of passion. You ought to know that I don't care two straws for your names. In consideration of a certain sum of money, you made a bargain, some three years ago, that you would never attempt to see Miss Van Tromp again."

"You extorted the consent from me!" Blaine said,

sullenly, and with a look of defiance at the lawyer.

"The method had nothing to do with it," Edwards replied, carelessly. "You haven't kept your agreement and you don't intend to keep it."

"No, I do not!" cried Blaine, fiercely.

"Well, I intend that you shall keep it!"

Blaine glared at the old lawyer in scornful contempt.

"You forget a certain legal document I hold."

"No, I don't; that is man's law; I possess a right given me by a higher power. Her woman's nature will believe sooner in the law of heaven than the law of earth."

"You mean that you intend to use her woman's weakness to shield you from the consequences of your own act?"

"Exactly; your shrewdness does you credit," Blaine responded, sarcastically.

"Wait a bit! don't compliment me until I get through, then perhaps you won't feel like it," the lawyer observed, calmly. "I was quite prepared for this move on your part; now see how I frustrate it. I have given orders to keep all the newspapers away from Ernestine, so that she cannot learn of your present peril; by twelve o'clock I shall have her in a railway train, and carry her off in the country where the chances are a hundred to one against her seeing a city journal with any reference to your trial, and there, in the country, I am going to have her married, and the moment that little ceremony is concluded, what becomes of your authority, eh?"

In agony of spirit, Blaine faced to the wall and answered not.

The lawyer waited for a moment, then understanding that Blaine's silence confessed his defeat, got up and left the cell.

Only one hope of rescue now for John Blaine. Would Rosaline, the diamond beauty, keep faith, or leave him to the mercy of his foes?

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE THIRD ANGEL.

THE clang of the cell door closing behind the old lawyer, roused Blaine from his gloomy despair. He looked around and saw that he was alone.

"Two strands have snapped," he muttered, slowly; "will the third hold? My only trust now is in Rosaline. Mary is powerless to help me. Her nature is soft and womanly; tears she can give, but not the desperate measures which alone can save me. Ernestine, with her money, might have found some way to free me from the web in which I am entangled like a huge, helpless fly. But this wily lawyer has baffled me there. Of the three guardian angels one is powerless, another removed from my reach, and the third—I wish I was as sure of an escape from this plight as I am that she will do all in her power to save me."

And then Blaine set his teeth firmly together.

"She must! She shall save me!" he cried, appealing as it were to the cold stone walls. "She has both money, wit and courage, and knows how to make the most of all three. It's strange," he mused, sinking his voice almost to a whisper; "she was the first of the three, and I have always loved her best; strange, then, that in the hour of my deadly peril, I can only call on her to come to my aid."

Blaine's meditations were interrupted by one of the keepers, who announced another visitor.

And then in the heart of the prisoned man came a glad feeling of joy as he heard the rustle of a woman's dress in the corridor.

His heart had guessed rightly; his visitor was Rosaline Ameston.

Quickly she knelt by his side, and tenderly she passed her soft arms around his neck and rested her beautiful face against his cheek.

"My own dear girl!" the convict said, slowly, as he kissed the full rich lips. "You find me in difficulty again."

"Yes," she murmured.

"You must help me out."

"I will," she replied, instantly, as if the task was one of pleasure and not of toil.

"It won't be an easy matter," he said. "Your money and wit got me out of Sing-Sing, but I do not think that it will be as easy to buy a keeper here. It didn't take much to shut the eyes of the fellow up there while we cut the iron bars of the window, but I am afraid that we can't work the affair in that way here. You see, there we only had to buy one man, but here I think that a dozen at least will have to be 'seen.'"

"I will bribe the dozen if it takes all the money I have in the world," the girl said, firmly.

"It isn't the question of money here, my dear girl," Blaine said, thoughtfully, "but of men. It is always easy enough, as a general rule, to find one man out of twenty who will be willing to shut his eyes for a valuable consideration, but almost hopeless to expect to find five or ten. I do not think that the plan we tried before will do now. I suppose that you know that I am in a pretty tight place at present?"

The girl looked astonished. It was plainly evident from her face that she knew nothing of the events which had transpired on the preceding night.

"Isn't it in the papers this morning?" Blaine asked.

"I have not seen any of them."

"Ah, well, I'll explain," he said; "the police, led on by a personal foe, discovered my hiding-place last night and arrested me. Just as they got me in the street, I managed to slip my hands through the handcuffs which they had put on—you know what a little, narrow hand I have—and made a bold dash for liberty. This Virginian, who for years has hunted me down with such persistency, clinched with me and we rolled into the gutter together. I got him by the throat and dashed his head against the curbstone to make him let go his gripe, and, of course, you can easily guess that I used all the force I could. While I was hammering his head against the stones, he put a knife in me, and then the police rapped me over the head with a club, and that finished me. The Virginian was brought here at the same time I was last night, and died in an hour or so afterward; concussion of the brain, I believe the doctor said. Of course they lay his death at my door; so that I stand a pretty good chance of being tried for murder."

"But you say he wounded you," the girl said, anxiously.

"Yes, but it amounts to nothing unless I should happen to catch cold, the doctor says," replied Blaine, carelessly.

"And this cell is so cold and damp!" Rosaline exclaimed, with a shudder, as she looked around upon the discolored walls.

"I'm not much afraid of catching cold; the prospect of the gallows ahead troubles me more."

"But you gave the man his hurt while you were engaged in a struggle with him, and he wounded you, too. I should not think that would condemn you to the gallows."

"My dear, I was an escaped convict resisting recapture, and I had the man down under me choking him," Blaine replied. "Those points are going to tell pretty badly against me, and besides, all New York just now is howling for justice. It's mighty little show that I'll get."

"I will fee the best lawyers in the city to defend you!" the girl exclaimed.

"You're a dear good girl, Rosaline," he said, patting her cheek, affectionately, "but you must do something more than that. Even if I should be saved from the hangman's noose by some deftly-put legal quibble, I should go back to Sing-Sing with five or ten years' imprisonment added to that I already owe that celebrated institution. Now, Rosy, dear, I am not so young as I once was, and even ten years more of prison life will break me all to pieces. Besides, the chance is probable that instead of ten, I may get fifteen or twenty years more. This spasmodic attack of righteous justice which the judges and people of this modern Sodom are laboring under just now will make it rough for me. No, my dear, I must not be tried at all. Either with cunning or money you must get me out of these stone walls. Now that this man, Campbell, is dead, I shall be able to enjoy my life; before, I have always dreaded this demon, whose sole object in life seemed to be to hunt me down. Sleeping or waking, this man has haunted me like my shadow."

"Why did he hate you so bitterly?" asked the girl.

"The old story, my dear," and Blaine uttered a light laugh.

The girl looked him in the eye for a moment, and a sad expression came over her face.

"Oh, now don't look sad!" he exclaimed, quickly; "it was all over long ago, and what do you care for the past?"

"Yes, you are right," she answered, "I do not care."

"This fellow was her accepted lover when accident brought me in contact with the girl. She was a country lass, living in a little town in Virginia. Of course I easily won her away from the fox-hunting, whisky-drinking young Virginian, much to his anger. Since that time, and that was years ago, he has followed me with untiring hatred, but now at last I am free from his pursuit. But, to return to the other subject, do you not think that you can devise some plan by means of which I can escape?"

"Yes, I think I can," Rosaline replied, thoughtfully.

"That's my own brave girl!" he exclaimed, triumphantly. "It will probably be three or four weeks before my case comes to trial, so that you will have plenty of time. And, once I am free, I'll get out of this cursed country, and then, when I am safe in a foreign land, you can join me."

The girl shook her head silently.

"Will you not come?" he asked, in wonder.

"No," she replied, sadly; "after this one purpose is accomplished, I shall leave the world forever. I am sick of life."

Blaine guessed her idea at once.

"You will seek in some holy sisterhood to forget the world and all its vanities?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Well, I'll not say a single word to keep you from it."

He spoke with the air of a man consenting to a sacrifice. "Perhaps, after all that has happened, you will be happier away from me than with me."

"You know that I was educated in a convent, and now, tired of the world's life, tired of its strife, cares and its hollow victories, I pine for the quiet of the cloister," she said, with sincere earnestness. A broken heart Rosaline Ameston carried within her breast.

"Go, my dear; I'll not say ye nay, nor in the future will I ever try to bring you back to the strife of the world. Aid me but this once, and I am sure that I shall never have to call upon you for assistance again."

The prophecy was lightly spoken; John Blaine—now as free from care as the happy child—believed that it would be realized, and yet could he have looked into the future, it is possible he would not have carried so light a heart in his breast.

He did not oppose the girl's wish. What was one woman more or less to him? His cold heart had never truly loved, although capable of inspiring and exacting the most intense devotion. Already in imagination he was free and in a far-off sunny land, where beautiful faces smiled lovingly upon him and fresh young hearts beat impulsively to please him; and he cared not a whit even if the blood that colored the face and leaped quick from the heart came from the dusky Indian spring.

Then for a long time there was silence. The girl was deep in thought, and Blaine watched her earnest face.

Suddenly she raised her eyes again to his.

"Well?" he asked.

"I have thought of a way."

"And you think that there is a chance that it will succeed?"

"It can not fail!" she said, impulsively.

And then Blaine bowed his head and listened to her plan.

CHAPTER XLIV.

A BRAVE DEVICE.

THREE weary weeks John Blaine laid in prison before the day appointed for his trial; and in the three weeks the escaped convict had changed greatly. The damp air of his cell did not improve his appearance. His skin became as white and fair as a woman's, with not a trace of color on his cheeks. His wound, too, troubled him a great deal, and obstinately refused to close and heal; and yet, so trivial was it in its nature, that the doctor in attendance did not deem it necessary to order his removal to the hospital, and so the convict remained exposed to the damp air of his cell.

Every day regularly, Rosaline came to visit him, until at last there was hardly a keeper within the walls of the prison not acquainted with her by sight.

All wondered at the devotion she manifested toward the criminal; she, the fair and lovely girl.

John Blaine kept to his bed almost constantly and complained that his wound had greatly weakened him.

Careful, too, of his personal appearance was the criminal; three times a week regularly was he shaved; a proceeding utterly uncalled for, as the barber confidently informed one of his cronies, for Blaine's beard was slow of growth. But the convict had got the notion of shaving into his head, and, as it was a matter that concerned him alone no one objected.

Smooth as the face of a monk, pale and overcast always with sickly fancies was the countenance of the usually light-hearted John Blaine.

At first the prison officials had kept a close watch upon the prisoner. They remembered his daring escape from Sing-Sing and seemed to fear that even the gloomy Tombs would not be able to hold him.

But, as day after day passed on and the prisoner did not appear to improve in either health or strength, they perceived how utterly incapable Blaine was of making a desperate effort to burst his prison-bars, and the watch became less strict. In fact, he received no more attention than was paid to the other inmates of the prison.

John Blaine's trial had been fixed for Tuesday, and on the Saturday previous, Rosaline paid her visit as usual, coming early in the morning; and about ten o'clock the eminent criminal lawyer who had been retained by Rosaline to defend Blaine, dropped in.

The lawyer had not held out any false hopes; he had plainly said that, in the present temper of the people, the chances were that the prisoner would receive but little mercy.

Blaine seemed weaker and more dispirited than usual, and the eminent legal gentleman as he conversed with his client really came to the conclusion that he would cheat the gallows, by dying in prison.

Rosaline, attired, as was usual with her, in a plain dark dress, with a thin gray veil drawn down over her face, seemed deeply afflicted.

The lawyer withdrew about twelve o'clock, and about half an hour afterward one of the keepers noticed the dark dress of the woman emerging from the door of Blaine's cell.

Her heart was evidently full of sorrow, for she carried her handkerchief in her hand, and every now and then passed it under her veil and applied it to her eyes.

And the keeper, as he locked the cell-door of the convict, glanced in at the little grating and saw that Blaine was still extended on his bed. His face looked deadly pale, and he was breathing hard as if in pain.

Rosaline passed the outer keeper at the same time as two or three other visitors.

The keeper hardly troubled himself to look at her ticket, so familiar was the face and form of the woman to him. And then, a minute or so afterward, she stood in the street, breathing the free air of heaven, which the lungs inhaled in deep draughts as a delightful change from the damp, unwholesome air of the gloomy prison.

After the departure of Rosaline, Blaine never stirred from his bed. He eat but little of his food, and the keeper who served the food remarked, after quitting the cell, that Blaine looked thinner and paler than ever, and like the lawyer he predicted that the prisoner would never live to see his trial out.

The next day being Sunday, no visitors were admitted, and Blaine remained in quiet.

He still kept his bed, and the keepers began to be alarmed, and early Monday morning the doctor was sent for.

When the keeper opened the cell door and announced that gentleman, Blaine, with a hollow groan, turned his face to the wall, as though to evade his scrutiny. This somewhat surprised the doctor, for Blaine had always submitted cheerfully to his examinations.

He advanced at once to the side of the little bed, believing that the prisoner was seriously ill. Blaine had buried his face in the pillow.

The doctor bent over the prostrate form and placed his hand upon the heart of the prisoner; he thought that Blaine had fainted.

Hardly had his hand touched the yielding form when a cry of astonishment burst from his lips.

John Blaine was a woman!

The doctor believed at first that his senses had deceived him. But then the pale face of Rosaline, upturned from the pillow, looked full into his. The deception could no longer deceive.

He saw the wonderful resemblance and understood in an instant how the prisoner had turned the circumstance to his advantage.

The alarm was instantly given. But the warden, after hearing all the particulars, guessed at once that the prisoner was far beyond the chance of recapture. He comprehended that the escape had taken place on the Saturday previous, and though the keeper swore stoutly that it was the woman and not John Blaine that had passed out, still the fact remained that John Blaine was not within the prison walls and the girl was.

One uncertain hope the warden clutched at; by means of threats he might be able to extort from the girl, who had played so bold and skillful a game for John Blaine's sake, the line of escape planned by the prisoner.

In the prison cell, the warden interviewed the girl. He found her dressed in John Blaine's clothes sitting on the edge of the little bed.

"What is your name?" asked the prison official, in a not over-courteous tone.

"Rosaline Ameston Blaine," she answered, not at all awed by the warden's manner.

"John Blaine's wife?"

"Daughter."

This rather astonished the warden, for he had no idea that Blaine was old enough to have a daughter like Rosaline; but when he reflected, he remembered that though Blaine could easily have passed for thirty, it was not unlikely that he was nearer forty or forty-five.

"Are you aware that you have rendered yourself liable to the law by this trick?" he demanded, sternly.

"Yes," replied Rosaline, quietly.

"But as you are a woman I do not desire to proceed to harsh measures, and if you will reveal to me what you know of the prisoner's intentions—how he proposed to escape from the city, I will see that you are not troubled in regard to your share in the escape."

"I am fully prepared to suffer, sir, for what I have done," the girl replied, firmly.

"Are you aware of what the consequence may be of this action on your part?" demanded the warden, in anger.

"No, sir, nor do I care," Rosaline exclaimed, scornfully. "If it had been to give my life for his, I should not have hesitated for a moment."

The look upon the girl's face fully convinced the prison official that she would not have quailed at the sacrifice.

The warden withdrew from the cell, vanquished.

The police authorities held a consultation, but what action to take they knew not. Blaine had forty hours' start, at the least, and as he had escaped on Saturday, they shrewdly suspected that he had chosen that particular day of the week, first, because it was not likely that his escape would be discovered until the Monday; second, because it was "steamer day," and of the dozen or so steamships which left New York harbor, it would be difficult to guess on which he had taken passage, and almost impossible, even if that fact was known, to pursue and capture him. The police were convinced that Blaine had fled to a foreign land.

All they could do in the premises was to send a cable message to England to keep a look-out for the fugitive, and to instruct them to send similar instructions to the principal continental ports.

And Rosaline—what was done with her?

Nothing! When was ever anything done with a woman in free America, no matter what crime she had committed, if she was young, pretty, and had plenty of money to see her through?

Rosaline escaped "scot-free," and in after years few, in the dark-robed sister of mercy known as "Sister Bridget," would have recognized the diamond beauty.

CHAPTER XLV.

A JOINING OF HANDS.

AND just a week after John Blaine's cunning escape from the Tombs, a merry wedding-party were assembled in the mansion house of a broad plantation, about three miles above the settlement known as Pilatka, on the broad and sluggish St. John's, Florida.

The orange plantation was known as the Edwards Place, and belonged to the old New York lawyer, who had purchased it at the close of the war, as a refuge from the cold northern winters.

To the Florida plantation the lawyer had carried Ernestine, determined to remove her out of the reach of John Blaine, and from the range of the New York newspapers.

The girl had no suspicion that Blaine had been recaptured, and fully believed that he had succeeded in escaping to Europe.

With the girl and the old lawyer came Blackie, Elbert Van Tromp, and the light-hearted Irishman, Gorman O'Shane.

It is hardly necessary to remark that Mr. Edwards was not aware of the manner by which the gentlemanly Irishman got his living, and hadn't the remotest idea that he was entertaining in his mansion one of the most skillful billiard "sharps" in America.

He accepted O'Shane on Elbert's introduction, and although he didn't exactly accept as gospel truth O'Shane's "rose-colored" description of his family's grand estates in "Oireland," yet still he believed him to be a gentleman and a man of property.

The old lawyer took a fancy to Blackie, and urged forward the marriage as much as possible. Another reason for that, too; he wished to forever silence John Blaine's claim to exercise authority over the heiress.

Ernestine, loving Blackie with all the strength of her fresh young heart, did not require much urging to complete her happiness by giving her hand to the man who already possessed her heart. One thing only she stipulated for, and that was that her lover should know all the facts relating to John Blaine, and then should be at liberty to refuse to complete the contract if he thought proper.

"Do you take the man for an idiot?" Edwards grumbled, then immediately sought the young lover; and pacing up and down the broad veranda, between the puffs of a cigar the old lawyer told to Blackie the story of Ernestine's father, John Blaine.

How the mother, then a young girl, traveling in Europe, had met the handsome adventurer, and ran away with and married him. How the father, smarting under the disgrace, for Blaine, even then was a criminal from justice, had kept the matter secret and had brought his daughter and her child home, and had reported that the husband had died abroad, and had procured an act of legislature changing Ernestine's name from Blaine to Van Tromp. Blaine couldn't very well contradict in person the report of his death for fear of certain legal charges hanging over his head, but he had managed to see his wife by stealth; and, strange to say, nothing could wean her from him, and that love she had instilled into the child from its earliest years. But when Ernestine was about sixteen, by a deftly arranged plan, the lawyer, Edwards, had contrived to get Blaine into his power and forced him to consent to a divorce. Hardly had the decree been procured when the wife died; separation from the man she loved killed her, and yet she had not dared to oppose her father's will. Then came old Van Tromp's death, and his property was left to Ernestine, whom Edwards immediately hurried off to Europe to get her out of John Blaine's way, for he well knew that the unscrupulous adventurer would leave no stone unturned to influence his child, despite the divorce. When John Blaine was safely caged in Sing-Sing, he allowed her to return.

Of course the story hadn't the slightest effect on Blackie. As he aptly expressed it, "What do I care for what her father has been, or is?"

And so, in the dimly-illuminated parlor of the old Southern mansion—for gas was a luxury not known on the "Edwards Place"—with the rich perfume of the orange groves stealing in through the windows,

filling the air with its strong incense, Ernestine became the wife of Blackie.

O'Shane rubbed his hands in delight as the newly-made husband kissed his fair young bride, and whispered in Elbert's ears:

"Isn't that illigant? Bedad! it's worth a hundred dollars to me to see that smack, d'ye mind?" and he nudged Van Tromp in the side, facetiously.

Blackie little thought as he kissed the fresh and dewy lips of his fair young bride—and for the moment the image of Rosaline's beautiful face floated before him—that the two girls were half-sisters.

And the old lawyer who had trapped John Blaine so nicely in the past, never guessed that the cool and heartless adventurer, not only had two, but three wives, all at the same time, and not one of the women but believed that she alone possessed his whole heart.

When Chocolate returned home on the evening that Blaine had been surprised by the police, Mary could no longer keep the secret, and to Chocolate she confided all her trouble, but made the girl promise that she would not reveal it either to Stewart or to her own lover.

She visited Blaine in the Tombs, but he kissed her forehead and forbade her ever to come and see him again.

"Think that I am dead, and marry the man you love," he said, as he bid her good-by. "I shall never trouble you, and you need never tell him that you are a daughter of the felon, John Blaine. Tell him that both your parents died in Virginia."

But Mary was too honest a girl to deceive the man she loved. She was the daughter of a convict, and not fit to be his wife.

The second she told him, the first she kept back, and Stewart wondered what the terrible secret could be.

Then came the news of Blaine's escape; it leaked out in spite of the efforts of the prison officials to keep it secret.

Chocolate jumped for joy. She thought that now Mary would yield to Stewart's wish. The little woman was getting impatient; she was putting off her own wedding in hopes that Mary would get ready to be married at the same time, but still the girl refused.

Winter slowly passed away, and Mary remained obstinate, although it was plain to Chocolate that she was gradually yielding. One evening in the early part of March, as the two girls sat chatting together, Chocolate as usual trying to persuade Mary to be happy, a middle-aged man, evidently a seaman by profession, knocked at the door and inquired for Miss Mary Martin. Chocolate, who had answered the knock, invited him in and introduced him to Mary.

"Prepare yourself, miss, for some bad news," he said. "I'm second officer of the steamer Ontario. Your father, John Martin, sailed with us on our last voyage to Brazil, and on the way out, miss, we had very rough weather, and your father was sickly, suffering from an old wound, miss, and he caught cold in it, and—" the sailor hesitated in some little confusion.

"Go on, sir," Mary urged, rising in her excitement.

"Well, you won't see him any more, miss," he blurted out, in his honest, seamanlike way.

Just a single gasp Mary gave, and then she sunk fainting into her chair.

"Don't be frightened, sir; she's only fainted!" Chocolate cried, springing to her friend's assistance.

"Lord, miss, I hope I haven't killed her!" the sailor cried.

"Oh, no, sir; she's coming to, now," Chocolate said, in her brisk way.

"I was kinder rough about it, but I spun it out the best way I knew how. I was with him when he died, and he asked me as a last favor if I'd find out his daughter and tell her of his death, and give her this little parcel."

Then the gentleman took a small sealed packet out of his pocket and laid it on the table.

Chocolate thanked him and the sailor retreated.

When Mary revived she examined the packet. It contained some two thousand dollars in bills, the contributions of Ernestine and Rosaline to give John Blaine a new start in a foreign land. A few lines, evidently penned by a feeble hand on a little scrap of paper, accompanied the bills:

"Long before you read this I shall be food for fishes. You can now marry the man you love. I send you what little fortune I have. Forget me as soon as possible. JOHN BLAINE."

The second officer of the good steamship Ontario had little idea of the value of the packet he carried from the dying man to the girl in the tenement-house, or of the happiness which his news was the means of creating.

Stewart pleaded no longer in vain, and Chocolate made Weathers supremely happy by throwing her arms around his neck, declaring that she loved him a great deal better than he did her, and that she was ready to get married whenever he pleased.

Three girls, happy in the transports of love, and the fourth finding peace and rest, ministering to the poor and afflicted.

The Virginian, Campbell, sleeps quietly in an unmarked grave, "life's fitful fever" o'er; and the sailor's son, wild, reckless, handsome, cold-hearted John Blaine, lies a hundred fathoms deep beneath the rolling wave.

THE END.

Three-Fingered Jack,

The Road-Agent of the Rockies;

OR,

THE BOY MINER OF HARD LUCK.

BY JOSEPH E. BADGER, JR.

CHAPTER I.

A ROAD-AGENT IN SPIKE OF HIMSELF.

"HALT, there! Move a finger and I'll fill you so full of holes that your carcass won't hold water!"

The words rung out clear and distinct upon the morning air, rendered doubly significant by the sharp, metallic *click-click*, telling of one or more firearms being prepared for instant use.

The traveler promptly obeyed, in so far that he halted abruptly, the clear, mellow whistle with which he was beguiling his way ceasing as suddenly, while his eyes turned instinctively toward the dense clump of bushes from whence had issued the startling mandate. And, though his bronzed cheek grew a thought paler, his right hand quickly closed upon the revolver butt at his hip.

"None of that—keep your hands free, or there'll be a feast for the black vultures right where you stand now!" sharply added the same voice. "Thank your patron saint that we are feeling in a comfortable humor to-day, else a brace of bullets would have ordered your halt, instead of my sweet voice. You see—we are five to one—and that one a baby."

"Baby or not—give me half a show and I'll fight the lot—but no! you skulk behind cover and shoot down honest men from behind—"

"Don't they grow men bigger than that, where you came from?" and, grinning with the grace of a snarling coyote, the speaker emerged from his covert.

There was a strong contrast between the two, thus confronting each other.

The traveler was a trifle below the medium height of man, and seemed rather "chunky" in build, though that was in part the effect of his heavy, ill-fitting miner's suit of woolen and corduroy. In the chaste language of the P. R., he was one who would "peel well." His face, though bronzed by sun and wind, was tinged with pink and white. This, added to the soft fuzzy down—not unlike that upon a peach—shading his upper lip and along his jaws, gave him a schoolboyish air, not calculated to inspire awe in the breast of a rough "forty-niner," or a knight of the road such as now confronted the lad. But there was an expression around the clear-cut, red lips, a steady glitter in the full blue eye that indicated more than appeared upon the surface.

The laughing outlaw was tall, rising six feet, of a gaunt, bony and angular build, yet apparently active and supple as a mountain lion. A livid scar transversed his face, which had cut into and distorted the vision of one eye. A straggling, wiry black beard and mustache, long locks of greasy hair, a torn and blood-stained suit of Mexican garments, a belt fairly bristling with knives and revolvers, a straight-bladed, two-edged sword hanging naked at his hip, a long "Kentuck rifle" in his hand—such was the "outfit" of the road-agent.

"What do you want with me, anyhow?" sharply demanded the youth, his eyes glowing at the taunt. "If you are a thief, you've struck a blind lead here. I'm 'shoal on the bar'—haven't got dust enough to buy a square meal—"

"We're after bigger game, baby—but you'll do to help pass away the time while waiting. As for gold—I've slit many a man's weasand for love—just to see the red blood gurgle and flow—I love it! It's mother's milk to me—dearer than all the red gold—"

His wolfish face became inflamed, his little eyes glowed and snapped, and one hand clutched nervously at his throat. The young man started, with a little cry.

"Three-Fingered Jack!"

"Ay! Manuel Garcia, or Three-Fingered Jack, as they call me," said the outlaw, proudly, holding up his mutilated hand. "You have heard of me!"

"I have—and I would give a year of my life to stand face to face with you, equally armed and with none of your cowardly coyotes around to aid you!" cried the miner, with intense bitterness, as he sprang back a pace and half drew a revolver.

But his desperate resolve was promptly frustrated. A pair of sinewy arms were wound around him from behind, and a chuckling outlaw held him helpless, clear of the ground, despite his furious struggles. Then Garcia, laughing ferociously, drew a knife and signed for his comrade to loosen his hold.

"Is it worth while, Jack?" interrupted a third outlaw. "He is not worth the plucking, and there is no honor to be gained by a man's killing a baby in knife-play."

"You are right, Cardoza—and I was a fool for minding his kicks. Bring him under cover, Jim; we will settle what to do with him there."

The captive was borne into the bushes, and there deposited in the center of the ring formed by the five outlaws. If not resigned to his fate, he realized the utter folly of attempting resistance, and quietly submitted. Yet there was no trace of fear to be read in his clear eye, nor upon his boyish face, though the conversation of the quintette was any thing but comforting.

"It's been two days since I had a fresh drink," muttered Three-Fingered Jack, playing thoughtfully with his knife.

"And my bullet-pouch is clean worded out," chimed in Mountain Jim, the renegade Kentuckian. "His hide looks kinder tender, and—think it'll answer, boys?"

"Bah! he laughs at you—see!" interrupted the fourth, a little smoke-dried scoundrel, whose full title would fill a column, but who was known to "the family" as "The Scorchers," from an incident well known in Sonora. "We must put our heads together and devise something extra for this mighty—"

"Drop it all," peremptorily cried Three-Fingers. "We'll have our sport and turn it to profit, as well. As for you, young sir—listen to me."

The mutilated outlaw changed his position to one more easy, and while his keen eyes were peering at the young miner through his shaggy eyebrows, he lazily sliced the earth and moss with his knife.

"I don't know why I don't slit your throat and be done with it—that's more in my line, and mayhap I'll do it yet—I make no promises, unless you choose to take the one chance which I'm going to offer you. I suppose you're what is called *honest*?"

"Suppose what you please—but understand one thing. You learn nothing from me until I see what you are driving at. Play with your cards on the table, and maybe I'll take a hand in."

"Knock the impudent cur in the head!" growled Mountain Jim.

"What's your name?" continued Garcia, without noticing the ruffian.

"Little Volcano," shortly replied the prisoner.

"Good enough! Now listen. You have heard of us; you know what we are. Naturally enough we don't like those whom the world calls honest men—they are fools and cowards, every one. They either don't know enough to be road-agents, or else they are afraid of the consequences. You don't seem to be either. You would be an honor to our family—when you grow a little older—"

"Thank you for nothing!" sneered the young miner. "If you hadn't taken such care to tie my hands, I'd give you an answer that you couldn't mistake."

With remarkable forbearance for him, Garcia laughed quietly. He had decided upon his course and was not to be driven from it.

"Don't borrow trouble—we don't pick up recruits for our noble army so carelessly. You couldn't join us if you begged till all was blue, for you're an American and our master hastes them as the devil does holy water. Lucky you fell into my hands instead of his!"

"Yes—report says you are a model of humanity!" and the blue eyes glowed with angry hatred as he recalled the horrible tales told of this blood-stained devil in human shape.

"Let that pass. This is what I mean: I'll give you one chance for life. If you refuse it, say your prayers beforehand. You won't have time after. You understand?"

"Clear as mud! I may understand better when you tell me the rest," coldly replied Little Volcano.

"I said you'd make a good road-agent, with practice. If you make me lie, so much the worse for you. You see yonder trail? It leads to the town of Hard Luck. There are not many travelers along it, except by stage. So much the better for you, since you must stop and go through the first passenger who chances along, or else have your throat slit as you lie."

The four outlaws who had been listening rather impatiently to the somewhat prosy explanation of their comrade, here expressed their delight at the novel entertainment promised them.

"It'll be better'n a dog-fight, won't it?" chuckled Mountain Jim, nudging Cardoza with his elbow.

"Yes—if the pilgrim only shows fight," added that worthy.

"Well, which is it?" demanded Three-Fingered Jack, as he turned toward the prisoner. "The knife or—?"

"Let me think—there's no one in sight yet," muttered Little Volcano, in a low, strained voice.

"You know the consequences. I don't care, myself, how you decide," carelessly added Garcia, as he rolled over, and producing a deck of well-worn cards from his bootleg, the party were soon deeply interested in the beauties of *monte*.

Little Volcano—as he had given his name—watched them moodily enough. It was, to say the least, a disagreeable predicament into which he had fallen. Joaquin Murieta and his gang of cutthroats and footpads were then a power in the land, carrying matters with a high hand, writing their names in letters of blood throughout the Golden State, here to-day, there to-mor-

And of them all, not even Joaquin himself was feared and execrated more than Three-Fingered Jack—the fiend in human guise, who lured for the mere pleasure of slaying—whose victims—among them helpless women and children—could be numbered by the score.

All this the prisoner knew; he knew, too, that arcia would not hesitate to put his threat into execution at the slightest provocation.

"Say, old man," he called out, sharply. "Supposing there's more than one pilgrim—"

"So much the worse for you. One or twenty, you must halt and go through the next party that comes along yonder trail. If you do it, then you are free to go your way—if not—you understand?"

Little Volcano sunk back and relapsed into moody silence. There was one chance. The trail to Hard Luck was not one noted for its travel. The patience of the outlaws might be exhausted before any "pilgrim" came along.

This hope was crushed almost as soon as conceived. Three-Fingered Jack suddenly dropped his cards and bent his ear attentively, a grim smile curling his heavy lip. Faint and sounding from afar, the listeners could just distinguish a whistle—as though some wayfayer was beguiling his step with a merry tune.

"Your chance is coming, young hill-on-fire," grinned Garcia, turning to Little Volcano. "Will you take it?"

"You know I must," was the sullen reply. "Set me free and give me my weapons."

"So you can use them on us, eh? Well, we'll run the risk. Mind—the first crooked step you take will be your last. You've got to go through that mocking-bird, or we'll put lead enough in your carcass to anchor you in forty fathoms—mind that!"

"If you're afraid, you can hide yourself first, then throw me my tools," sneered the young miner. "Five men afraid of one little boy—and he unarmed and with his hands tied!"

"Crow as loudly in his ear and you'll scare him to death," laughed Garcia, as he released the captive and restored his weapons. "When he gets to yonder rock, show yourself and go through him. If he cuts up rusty, give him a pill. If he is fool enough to make a fuss and rub you out, we'll take care to avenge you—"

"Much good that'll do me! Thank you, for nothing, Three-Fingered Jack. Only—I wish it was you coming along the trail!"

"Thar he comes—only one feller!" muttered Mountain Jim, in a tone of disgust. "An old cripple, too!"

The pilgrim, still whistling merrily, appeared upon the ridge, and Little Volcano cast an anxious glance toward the one whom he was sentenced to rob or lose his own life.

He was tall—would have been remarkably so only for a stoop which amounted to almost deformity. His hair and long beard were of a dingy yellowish white. His clothes would have put any respectable scarecrow to the blush, so dilapidated were they, patched and pieced though they had been with odds and ends until scarce a trace of the original material remained. One shoulder supported an old rusty rifle, with bandaged stock, from the barrel of which dangled a bundle tied up in a piece of sacking.

"When he reaches the rock—out you go!" hissed Three-Fingered Jack, holding a cocked revolver where Little Volcano could see it. "And mind—no tricks. The first sign of treachery and you're a dead man!"

"You said that before—do you think I'm a fool?" angrily muttered the boy miner, as he looked to his weapons.

The old man reached the rock indicated.

"Halt there! lift a finger and you're a dead man!"

Little Volcano leaped forward with leveled revolver, uttering this challenge in a clear, sharp voice. The old man paused abruptly, his tall form straightening itself, but then a puzzled look came over his face, as he saw his antagonist.

"Not a word—shell out your dust or you're a dead man!" added Little Volcano, still advancing; then, when almost within arm's length of the traveler, he muttered: "We're watched by a gang of Joaquin's men—play frightened, or we're gone up!"

"Don't—don't p'int that thing this-a-way—s'posin' it'd go off—whar'd I be? Don't shoot—I'll give you all I've got—"

"Hurry up, then—my arm's getting tired—shell out, or I'll blow you to never-come-back—again in less'n no time?" cried Little Volcano, for the benefit of the listening outlaws; adding in a whisper: "Edge toward the bank—do it natural as you can—once there we'll give them the slip yet."

"I will—I will—the dust is in my bundle—don't shoot and I'll git it for you, mister," quavered the miner, as he swung his long rifle around from his shoulder.

The bundle fell from the barrel with such force that it rolled over and over until it paused within half a dozen feet of the steep slope. But so natural was it done that even Little Volcano believed it the result of an accident.

"It's in thar—my precious gold!" whimpered the old man, as he hobbled toward the bundle,

closely followed by the boy miner, whose revolver was at his head all the time.

"Shall it out, then—quick! Now jump down the hill and hunt your cover!"

As though impelled by the same spring, the two sprung over the bank into the hollow, a rifle-bullet passing over their heads.

CHAPTER II.

THE AMBUSH SPRUNG.

DEXTROUSLY kicking his precious bundle before him, the old man sprung nimbly across the narrow space that intervened, disappearing from view of the outlaws, who were highly amused at the success of their little comedy, before they even suspected anything wrong.

Little Volcano followed the "pilgrim's" example, but not one moment too soon. Three-Fingered Jack saw that more was being played than was down in the bill, and broke cover, sending a hasty shot after his refractory pupil, but which only hastened Little Volcano's descent as the ragged bullet hissed past his ear.

The trail running between Hangtown and Hard Luck at this point wound along the hillside, where a level ledge of near fifty yards in width afforded a natural road-bed. Upon the right, or rather toward the east, the ledge sloped down, almost perpendicular for twenty feet; beyond this was an irregular level space, thickly studded with boulders, bushes and stunted trees. Down this declivity the two miners had sprung.

Scrambling to his feet, the old man darted away with an activity remarkable for one of his years, closely followed by Little Volcano, whose voice rung out in a merry peal of laughter at the success of his ruse.

"Kiver, youngster—thar burns more powder!" cried the old man, as the angry yells of the outwitted road-agents blended with several pistol-shots. "Kiver—quick! They're so blamed keerless they'd jist as soon hit a feller as not!"

Little Volcano promptly obeyed, plunging headforemost into a clump of bushes which grew beside a large boulder; but not so the old man. Wheeling quickly, he threw up his rifle, scarce waiting until it reached a level ere touching the hair-trigger.

A muffled, choking howl of agony followed, and flinging aloft his arms, leaping far out from the ledge, one of the road-agents plunged heavily down upon the boulders, a lifeless mass. The Scorchers had reached the end of his earthly trail.

"Whoo-oop!" recklessly yelled the man, tossing back his long hair in the mountain breeze, as he dextrously reloaded his rifle, making no effort to seek cover. "Whoo-oop! whar's the next critter as wants to buck against the untamed waugh-horse o' the desert? Hyar I stan', the biggest little man as ever wore ha'r! My name's 'tarnal death to sinners, an' when I light onto 'em, it's like a double an' twisted yearthquake a-bustin'! Hyar I stan', ragged an' dirty, the bob-tailed bull of Salt river, as kin—"

"Cover, you old fool! D'y' want to stand up there and get shot like a hog in a pen?" angrily yelled Little Volcano, as he sprung up and took a snap shot at the outlaws, just in time to divert the aim of Three-Fingered Jack, whose bullet cut a lock of hair from the old man's temple.

"Mebbe 'twould be as well," coldly replied that worthy, as the road-agents dodged back again. "I jist wanted to coax the onmannerly varmints down hyar, so we could jist nat'ally chaw 'em up an' spit 'em to thunder. But they won't come—they hain't got no sense o' fun in 'em—not a durned bit!" and he sniffed contemptuously as he crouched down beside the boy miner.

"They'll come fast enough to suit your health—don't you be uneasy on that score. If you've tramped these diggings long, you'd ought to know that Three-Fingered Jack is a bulldog that doesn't loose his grip until the piece comes out—once let him taste blood," said Little Volcano, keeping a keen watch along the ledge with pistol ready for instant use.

"All as comes won't go back ag'in on thar own legs," quietly returned the old man. "They—" He rapidly leveled his rifle, but lowered it without firing.

"They're wuss'n a forty-legged flea! A streak o' greased lightnin' couldn't ketch aim at 'em afore they dodge back—"

"Mind! I believe they're coming!"

"No sech luck—they're jist prospectin' to see ef we've puckacheed. They won't show a patch o' hide big enough to kiver a bullet, long 's we're hyar—wuss luck!" grumbled the old man in the tone of one who feels himself defrauded of his just dues.

"You don't seem quite as bad scared now as when we were up yonder," half laughed Little Volcano, after a pause of silent watching.

"Who wouldn't be skeered when he was walkin' along peac'bly thinkin' o' nothin', to hev a whale of a feller—a reg'lar mounting on wheels—"

"Easy, stranger," muttered the boy miner, his cheek flushing. "I know I'm little, but I'm big enough to mount any man that pokes fun at me."

"I 'cept your 'pology—don't say anythin' more 'bout it—I ain't one to b'ar hard feelin's—"

He paused abruptly, half raising his rifle, his keen gray eyes fairly glowing as he watched a small stone bounding down the slope nearly two hundred yards above their position.

"The imps is at work," he muttered, never lowering his gaze. "Keep a good watch above and below us. Somebody set that dornick a-rollin'—they ain't no frost in the ground to loosen it. They think to git around us an' pick us off from ahind."

"They can do that without giving us a show, if they take trouble enough," said the youth, thoughtfully. "There's cover enough there to hide a thousand, and within easy range, too."

"Four to one an' playin' a sneak game like that! Darn such ornary, onperlite, mossbacked scrubs anyway! They hain't got no more sense o' fun than a lame, one-legged hoppergrass ketched out courtin' by a black frost."

"That's good enough, but while we're talkin', they're working. We can't cover both sides here—"

"They's only one thing to do—we've got to puckachee, hot foot—"

"I hate to run from 'em," muttered Little Volcano.

"Who said anythin' 'bout runnin' from 'em? We're goin' fer 'em! They think we're fools. They sot that rock a-rollin' jest to scare us, then they jumped clean over, and hunkered down some'eres below, a-openin' thar tater-traps fer us to run right smack in—an' that's jist what we're gwine to do," gravely interposed the old man.

"It does sound better that way," laughed Little Volcano. "How is it? You first or I?"

"Don't be snatched. Let 'em git scattered as fur as they like—they won't be so much chance o' thar drappin' us. Git ready fur a run—do your tallest jumpin' an' dodgin', an' ef you see a blue pill a-comin', don't try to knock it out o' the way with your noddle."

All around was still and seemingly peaceful. Only the usual sounds of a summer day amid the mountains—the faint, fitful breeze agitating the dense foliage; the occasional bark of the pine squirrel, feeble and irresolute, as though half-ashamed of himself for breaking the silence, but then, taking courage from the ringing call of the gaudy cardinal grosbeak, he twitched his bushy tail vivaciously, *chit-chirring*—only to cease abruptly and dart high up the towering pine.

The old hunter pointed significantly at this; plain as the page of a printed book the squirrel's movement was to him.

From the roadbed alone could their bit of cover guard them. From behind, where the scrubby bushes and thick-lying boulders afforded cover in abundance, they would be entirely exposed to the aim of any enemy in that quarter. The rolling stone, the affrighted squirrel and red-bird, told the quickwitted hunter that the road-agents had reasoned the same, and were losing no time in putting the plan into execution. Down the valley, then, lay their only hope of escape.

"Now, then—both together—play you was a hop-toad as has swallowed a red-hot tumble-bug! Now, laigs, do your duty!"

Leaving their cover the two men darted down the valley at top speed, dodging, twisting, leaping over boulders, tearing through or doubling around bushes with a celerity little short of marvelous.

A yell of angry surprise—another and another; then came a sharp, spiteful crack as Three-Fingered Jack sent a bullet after the fugitives from his "pea-shooter"—a louder detonation as the contents—bullets and slugs—of the carbines followed suit; but back came a defiant yell and a taunting laugh from the miners.

"Whoo-ee!" squeaked the old man, turning abruptly and raising his rifle, hoping to catch an outlaw napping. "Whar's the two-legged critter as wants to mount the 'tarnal stud-hoss o' Gibralt'y? Hyar I stan'—six foot fo' o' cl'ar grit, nary sand-crack, puff nor wind-gall—my breff pizens tumble-bugs—I kin look a hole through a forty-foot wall—when I sit down it makes yearthquakes—when I squeel, the glorious eagle bird pulls out its tail feathers in despair—when I blow my bugle it makes harry-canes, an' when I chomps my teeth—"

His rifle spoke spitefully. A half-stifled scream followed by a spluttering volley of curses told that the bullet had not sped in vain.

Shrilly the old man laughed as he turned and darted nimbly after Little Volcano, reloading his weapon as he ran.

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